

Thailand

Thailand (Thai: ประเทศไทย, *Prathet Thai*) is the most visited country in [Southeast Asia](#), and for good reason. You can find thick jungle as green as can be, crystal blue waters that feel more like a warm bath than a swim in the ocean, and food that can curl your nose hairs while tap dancing across your taste buds. Exotic, yet safe; cheap, yet equipped with every modern amenity you need, there is something for every interest and every price bracket, from beachfront backpacker hostels to some of the best luxury hotels in the world.

Despite the heavy flow of tourism, Thailand retains its quintessential identity, with a culture and history all its own and a carefree people famed for their smiles and their fun-seeking *sanuk* lifestyle. Many travellers come to Thailand and extend their stay well beyond their original plans, and others never find a reason to leave.

Regions

Thailand can be divided into five geographic and cultural regions:



Northern Thailand (Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Sukhothai, Phitsanulok)
Chiang Mai, the remains of ancient kingdoms, hill tribes, and the [Golden Triangle](#).



Isaan
The great northeast region, sharing many cultural traits with neighbouring [Laos](#). Get off the beaten track and discover backcountry Thailand, mouthwatering food, and some magnificent Khmer ruins.



Central Thailand
[Bangkok](#), lowlands and historic Thailand.



Eastern Thailand
Beaches and islands within easy reach of Bangkok, like [Pattaya](#), [Ko Samet](#) and [Ko Chang](#).



Southern Thailand
Lush rainforest and hundreds of kilometres of coastline and beguiling islands in both the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand, plus [Phuket](#), [Krabi](#), [Ko Samui](#), [Ko Tao](#) and many more of Thailand's famous beach spots. Also the heart of [Islam](#) and Malay culture in Thailand.

Cities

- **1 Bangkok** (กรุงเทพมหานคร) — Thailand's bustling, frenetic capital, known among the Thai as Krung Thep
- **2 Ayutthaya** (พระนครศรีอยุธยา) — a historical city, UNESCO World Heritage Site and old capital of Siam (full name is Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya)

- **3 Chiang Mai** (เชียงใหม่) — de facto capital of Northern Thailand and the heart of Lanna culture
- **4 Chiang Rai** (เมืองเชียงราย) — gateway to the Golden Triangle, ethnic minorities and mountain treks
- **5 Hat Yai** (หาดใหญ่) — the largest city in Southern Thailand, near the Malaysian border, and home to an eclectic mix of Southern Thais, Thai-Chinese and Malay Muslims
- **6 Kanchanaburi** (กาญจนบุรี) — home of the Bridge over the River Kwai and numerous World War II museums
- **7 Nakhon Ratchasima** (นครราชสีมา) — largest city of the Isaan region, also known as Khorat.
- **8 Pattaya** (พัทยา) — one of the main tourist destinations, known for its wild nightlife
- **9 Sukhothai** (สุโขทัย) — Thailand's first capital, still with amazing ruins



Map of Thailand — [switch to interactive map](#)

Other destinations

- **1 Khao Sok National Park** (Thai: เขาสก) — one of the most beautiful wildlife reserves in Thailand
- **2 Khao Yai National Park** (Thai: เขาค้อ) — take a night time Jeep safari spotting deer or visit the spectacular waterfalls
- **3 Ko Chang** (Thai: เกาะช้าง) — once a quiet island, now undergoing major tourism development
- **4 Ko Lipe** (Thai: เกาะลันเตา) — small island in the middle of Tarutao National Park, with great reefs and beaches
- **5 Ko Pha Ngan** (Thai: เกาะพะงัน) — site of the famous Full Moon Party with miles of quiet coastline
- **6 Ko Samet** (Thai: เกาะเสม็ด) — the nearest island beach escape from Bangkok
- **7 Ko Samui** (Thai: เกาะสมุย) — comfortable, nature, and entertainment hippie mecca gone upmarket

- **8 Krabi Province** (Thai: กระบี่) — beach and water sports mecca in the south, includes Ao Nang, Rai Leh, Ko Phi Phi, and Ko Lanta
- **9 Phuket** (Thai:ภูเก็ต) — the original Thai paradise island, now very developed but with some still beautiful beaches

Understand


Called the "Land of Smiles", Thailand is the heart of the Southeast Asian mainland. It has relatively good infrastructure, with Bangkok being an intercontinental flight hub, and the country is the gateway to the region for most foreign visitors. The country is extremely well developed for tourism, and yet outside the backpacker hubs and expat hangouts, you'll find an underlying soul, culture and kindness that will leave you with a lifelong and perhaps life-changing impression. Whatever your cup of tea is, they know how to make it in Thailand.

This is not to say that Thailand doesn't have its downsides, including the considerable growing pains of an economy where an agricultural labourer is lucky to earn 100 baht per day while the *nouveaux riches* cruise past in their BMWs. Bangkok, the capital, is notorious for its traffic jams and rampant development has wrecked much of once-beautiful Pattaya and Phuket. In heavily touristed areas, some lowlives, both Thai and farang, have made scamming tourists into an art form.

Finally, despite being relatively economically developed, Thailand still suffers from problems that afflict most Southeast Asian countries, such as new towns and neighbourhoods built haphazardly and with no concern for architectural beauty, the lack of accessibility and pedestrian-friendliness in large cities, and often, presence of trash and litter in both cities and rural areas.

History

The earliest identifiable Thai kingdom was founded in Sukhothai in 1238, reaching its zenith under King Ramkhamhaeng in the 14th century before falling under the control of the kingdom of Ayutthaya, which ruled most of present-day Thailand and much of today's Laos and Cambodia as well, eventually also absorbing the northern kingdom of **Lanna**. Ayutthaya was sacked in 1767 by the Burmese, but King Taksin regrouped and founded a new capital at Thonburi. His successor, General Chakri, moved across the river to Bangkok and became King Rama I, the founding father of the **Chakri Dynasty** that still rules as a constitutional monarchy.

	
Capital	Bangkok
Currency	baht (THB)
Population	66.1 million (2017)
Electricity	220 volt / 50 hertz (NEMA 1-15, NEMA 5-15, Europlug, Schuko)
Country code	+66
Time zone	UTC+07:00, Asia/Bangkok
Emergencies	191 (police), 199 (fire department), +66-1669 (emergency medical services)
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Garlanded statue, Wat Rajanadda, Bangkok

Known as **Siam** until 1939, Thailand is Southeast Asia's oldest independent country and the only one never to have been colonised by a foreign power, and the country's inhabitants are fiercely proud of that fact. A bloodless revolution in 1932 led to a constitutional monarchy. During World War II, while Japan conquered the rest of Southeast Asia (see Pacific War), only Thailand was not conquered by the Japanese due to smart political moves. Allied with Japan during World War II, Thailand became a U.S. ally following the conflict. Thailand was a base of U.S. air operations during the Vietnam War, and was also a popular place for American soldiers fighting in Vietnam to have their R&R, thus kickstarting Thailand's world famous tourism industry. There was a communist insurgency, with little success, that only ended in 1983. After a string of military dictatorships and quickly toppled civilian prime ministers, Thailand stabilized into a fair approximation of a democracy and the economy boomed through tourism and industry.

On December 26, 2004, an earthquake in the Indian Ocean caused a tsunami to hit Thailand's western coast, causing tremendous damage and killing thousands of people, especially at the seaside resorts.

In September 2006, a swift and bloodless military coup overthrew populist tycoon **Thaksin Shinawatra**'s democratically-elected but widely criticized government, exposing a fault line between the urban elite that has ruled Thailand traditionally and the rural masses that supported Thaksin. Thaksin went into exile and a series of unstable governments followed, with the successors of Thaksin's *Thai Rak Thai* party and the royalist-conservative *People's Alliance for Democracy* duking it out both behind the scenes and, occasionally, out in the streets, culminating in Bangkok's airports being seized and shut down for a week in Nov 2008.

A new party led by Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, won the 2011 elections, but while like Thaksin, she maintained popularity in the Central Thai countryside, the North and Isaan, and among Muslims in the South, powerful people in the Thai military and the Bangkok establishment never accepted the legitimacy of her government, and on May 7, 2014, Thailand's Constitutional Court ordered her and her cabinet to step down. On May 22, 2014, the Thai army staged a bloodless coup, declared a nationwide curfew, and went about arresting members of Yingluck's Pheu Thai Party. The curfew was lifted on June 13, 2014, but the basic elements that have led to the conflict are still unresolved.

After the death in late 2016 of **King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX)**, the world's longest-reigning monarch and a deeply loved and respected figure of near-mythic proportions, his son **King Vajiralongkorn Bodindradebayavarangkun (Rama X)** ascended the throne. King Vajiralongkorn does not have anything close to the popularity that his father had enjoyed, and his reign has been marred by youth-led protests calling for the abolition of the monarchy. A general election was held in March 2019 under a new 2017 Constitution. However, the new constitution gives the military the exclusive right to appoint senators, and also gives senators a vote in selecting the prime minister, thus granting the military substantial influence in Thai politics.

Thailand has grown into the main economic centre of the region, and today attracts many migrant workers from its much poorer neighbours Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia.

Geography

Thailand lies north of the equator and comprises an area of 513,120 sq kms. The country features a landscape of varied topography including mountain ranges, fertile river plains and plateaus. The coastline has a total area of 3,219 kms and contains 1,430 offshore islands.

Politics

The **Kingdom of Thailand** (ราชอาณาจักรไทย *Ratcha-anachak Thai*) is a constitutional monarchy, with the king as head of state. The Thai parliament is bicameral, consisting of a military-appointed upper house known as the Senate, as well as a popularly-elected lower house known as House of Representatives. The prime minister is the head of government, and is voted in by the members of both houses of parliament.

In practice, the king's role is largely ceremonial, with the prime minister holding the most authority in government. However, the king and the royal family are still protected by strict *lèse-majesté* laws, which stipulate long jail terms for anybody convicted of insulting the king or any other members of the royal family.



Caution: *Lèse-majesté* (disrespecting the royal family) is punishable by up to **15 years in prison** in Thailand with the **minimum sentence being 3 years**, though sentences for foreigners are often more lenient than for Thai nationals. It includes **any act deemed an insult to the King, his image, his heir apparent or the regent**. The number of cases has increased since the 2014 military coup. **Conditions in Thai prisons are poor**, with prisons being severely overcrowded and there being a high risk of infectious disease. Avoid doing **anything** that could be interpreted as **insulting the King or members of the royal family**, including failing to stand when the royal anthem is played at a cinema, or stepping on currency (which displays an image of the King).

Climate

Thailand is largely **tropical**. It's hot and humid all year around with temperatures in the 28-35°C range (82-95°F), a degree of relief provided only in the mountains in the far north of Thailand. There are, however, three seasons:



Beach on Ko Tao

- **Cool:** From Nov to the end of Feb, it doesn't rain much and temperatures are at their lowest, although you will barely notice the difference in the south and will only need to pack a sweater if hiking in the northern mountains, where temperatures can fall as low as 5°C. This is the most popular time to visit and, especially around Christmas and New Year's or at Chinese New Year a few weeks later, finding flights and accommodation can be expensive and difficult.
- **Hot:** From Mar-Apr, Thailand swelters in temperatures as high as 40°C (104°F) and heat indices in the 50s°C (122-140°F), with April generally being the hottest month. Pleasant enough when sitting on the beach with a drink in hand, but not the best time of year to go temple-tramping in Bangkok.
- **Rainy:** From May-Oct, although it only really gets underway in Sep, when tropical monsoons hit most of the country. This doesn't mean it rains non-stop, but when it does it

pours and flooding is not uncommon.

There are local variations to these general patterns. In particular, the Central Gulf Coast of Thailand (including Ko Samui) has the rains reversed, with the dry peak season being May-Oct and the rainy off-season in Nov-Feb.

Demographics

Thailand is among one of the most diverse countries in the world.

Ethnic groups

- Native **Tais** [sic] are the largest ethnic group in the country. Tais speak a set of related languages, including not only Thai but also Lao, a dialect of which is spoken by the Isaan people in Northeast Thailand.
- **Khmer** people, who make up the majority of the population across the border in Cambodia, are numerous in Thailand, as well.
- Thailand is home to the largest ethnic **Chinese** population outside Greater China. They are well represented in all levels of Thai society, and many of the country's largest businesses, banks, and conglomerates were founded by them, and quite a number of them have served as prime minister. Most Thai-Chinese people are of **Teochew** descent. There is a great deal of intermarriage between Chinese and Tai people, facilitated by the traditional commonality of both groups being Buddhists. Thai-Chinese have assimilated into Thai society over the generations.
- **Malays** are mainly concentrated in Southern Thailand, with a sizeable community in Bangkok as well.
- Thailand is home to a large community of **Indians** and they are mainly concentrated in Bangkok. Thai Indians own and operate many of the country's textile businesses, have started and set up various factories around the country, and are major players in the jewelry trade. Most Thai Indians are of Punjabi descent.
- Northern Thailand is home to many **hill tribes** such as the Karen, the Mon, and the Hmong. Each hill tribe adheres to a unique set of customs and values.
- Thailand is home to a sizeable **Burmese** community. Most Burmese people come to Thailand as refugees, fleeing political instability and violence in their home country. Burmese people in Thailand tend to work in a wide range of menial jobs.
- There's a sizable **Pakistani** community in Thailand. A lot of Pakistanis in Thailand are Pakistani Christians. Many of them have come to Thailand as asylum seekers seeking a safe haven from religious discrimination and violence in Pakistan.
- Many **Jews** from Iraq, Iran, Israel and Afghanistan emigrated to Thailand during the 1950s.
- There's a sizable **Russian** community in Thailand. Many Russians are based in Phuket. Since 2022, many Russians have come to Thailand as refugees seeking a safe place to express themselves.

Religion

Thailand is, by law, a secular state. That being said, most Thai people are religious and consider religion to be an important part of their lives.

The following religions are officially recognised by the government: Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism.

The overwhelmingly dominant religion in Thailand is **Theravada Buddhism** and is practiced by virtually all Thais.

A significant minority of Thais are **Muslim**, mainly concentrated in the southern provinces. Most Thai Muslims are Sunni Muslims.

A small number of Thais are **Christian**. Christianity was introduced to Thailand by European missionaries in the 16th century. Most Thai Christians are Catholic, although there is a sizeable Protestant community.

Culture

Mainland Thai culture is heavily influenced by **Buddhism**. However, unlike the Buddhist countries of East Asia, Thailand's Buddhists follow the Theravada school, which is arguably closer to its Indian roots and places a heavier emphasis on monasticism. Thai temples known as **wats** — resplendent with gold and easily identifiable with their ornate, multicolored, pointy roofs — are ubiquitous. Becoming an orange-robed monk for a short period, typically the three-month rainy season, is a common rite of passage for young Thai boys and men. That being said, there are also prominent Mahayana Buddhist temples, most of which were built in Chinese architectural styles to serve the ethnic Chinese community.



Wat Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai

One pre-Buddhist tradition that still survives is the **spirit house** (ศาลพระภูมิ *saan phraphuum*), usually found at the corner of any house or business, which houses spirits so they don't enter the house and cause trouble. The grander the building, the larger the spirit house, and buildings placed in particularly unlucky spots may have very large ones. Perhaps the most famous spirit house in Thailand is the Erawan Shrine in Bangkok, which protects the Erawan Hotel (now the Grand Hyatt Erawan), built in 1956 on a former execution ground, and is now one of the busiest and most popular shrines in the city. It and several other popular shrines pay homage to *Hindu* deities. Hinduism was once the dominant religion in Thailand prior to the spread of Buddhism, and many traditional Thai arts continue to draw their inspiration from Hindu mythology.

Some traditional arts popular in Thailand include traditional Thai dancing and music, based on religious rituals and Court entertainment. There is a vibrant popular music scene with *morlam* and *lukthung* not at all overshadowed by Western style pop. Famously brutal **Thai boxing** (*muay Thai*), derived from the military training of Thai warriors, is undoubtedly the country's best known indigenous sport.

In addition to the mainland Thai culture, there are many other cultures in Thailand including those of the "hill tribes" in the northern mountainous regions of Thailand (e.g., Hmong, Karen, Lisu, Lahu, Akha), the southern Muslims, and indigenous island peoples of the Andaman Sea. The ethnic Chinese population has been largely assimilated into Thai culture, though vestiges of their Chinese heritage can still be found in

Bangkok's Chinatown. The Chinese have, however, left a huge impact on Thailand's culinary scene, and many dishes of Chinese origin, such as noodles, roast pork and steamed buns, have been widely adopted and are now seen as an integral part of Thai cuisine. The Thai-Chinese can generally be divided into two groups: those that migrated to Thailand as traders and labourers during the 19th and early 20th centuries, who mainly came from Fujian, Guangdong or Hainan and settled in the larger cities like Bangkok, Hat Yai and Phuket; and some groups of Kuomintang soldiers who fled China in the aftermath of the Chinese Civil War, who mainly came from Yunnan and settled in remote mountain villages along the Burmese border like Mae Salong and Ban Rak Thai.

Calendar

In addition to the Gregorian calendar, Thailand also uses the Thai solar calendar, the Thai version of the Buddhist calendar, which is 543 years ahead of the common era calendar. Thus, Thai year 2567 corresponds to the Western year 2024. Thai dates in English are often written as **B.E.**, short for "Buddhist Era".

Some Thai holidays are based on the Thai lunar calendar, so their dates change every year in the Western calendar.

Holidays

Thailand has many holidays, mostly related to Buddhism and the monarchy. Nobody celebrates all of them, except for banks, which seem to be closed a lot.

- **Chinese New Year** (ตรุษจีน). Starting in January or February (the exact dates vary according to the lunar calendar, see box), it is also known as the Spring Festival or the Lunar New Year and celebrations can last for about 15 days. Although not a public holiday, it is widely celebrated among the Thai-Chinese, who celebrate by cleaning their houses and offering food to their ancestors. This is mainly a time of abundant feasting. Visit Yaowarat, Bangkok's Chinatown to fully embrace the festivity.
- **Makha Bucha** (มาฆบูชา). Falls on the full moon of the third lunar month, which usually falls in February or March, and commemorates the spontaneous gathering of 1,250 people before the Buddha, which led to their ordination and subsequent enlightenment. At temples in Bangkok and throughout Thailand, Buddhists carry candles and walk around the main shrine three times in a clockwise direction.
- **Songkran** (สงกรานต์). Undoubtedly the most fun holiday, is the celebration of the Thai New Year, sometime in April (officially 13-15 Apr, but the date varies in some locations). What started off as polite



Wat Phra Si Sanphet, Ayutthaya



Lunar New Year dates

The year of the *Dragon* began on 4 Feb 2024 at 16:25, and the Lunar New Year was on 10 Feb 2024

- The year of the *Snake* will begin on 3 Feb 2025 at 22:10, and the Lunar New Year will be on 29 January 2025
- The year of the *Horse* will begin on 4 Feb 2026 at 4:02, and the Lunar New Year will be on 17 Feb 2026

ritual to wash away the sins of the prior year has evolved into the **world's largest water fight**, which lasts for three full days. Water pistols and Super Soakers are advised and are on sale everywhere. The best places to participate are Chiang Mai, the Khao San Road area in Bangkok, and holiday resorts like Pattaya, Ko Samui and Phuket. You will get very wet, this is not a spectator sport. The water-throwing has been getting more and more unpleasant as people have started splashing iced water onto each other. It is advisable to wear dark clothing, as light colours may become transparent when wet.

Contrary to popular belief, the change of the zodiac does not occur on the first day of the Lunar New Year, but instead occurs on Li Chun (立春 *lì chūn*), the traditional Chinese start of spring.

- **Coronation Day.** 5 May, commemorates the crowning of King Rama IX in 1950 (although his reign actually began on 9 Jun 1946 - making him the longest-serving monarch in Thai history)
- **Loy Krathong** (ลอยกระทง). Falls on the first full moon day in the twelfth month of the lunar calendar, usually in November, when people head to rivers, lakes and even hotel swimming pools to float flower and candle-laden banana leaves (or, these days, Styrofoam) floats called *krathong* (กระทง). The krathong is meant as an offering to thank the river goddess who gives life to the people. Thais also believe that this is a good time to float away your bad luck and many will place a few strands of hair or finger nail clippings in the krathong. According to tradition, if you make a wish when you set down your krathong and it floats out of sight before the candle burns out, your wish will come true. Some provinces have their own version of Loy Krathong, such as Sukhothai where a spectacular show takes place. To the north, Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai have their own unique tradition of launching *kom* or hot-air lanterns. This sight can be breath-taking as the sky is suddenly filled with lights, rivalling the full moon.
- **King's Birthday (Father's Day).** 28 July, the King's birthday is the country's National Day and also celebrated as Father's Day, when Thais pay respect to and show their love for his majesty the king. Buildings and homes are decorated with the King's flag (yellow with his insignia in the middle) and his portrait. Government buildings, as well as commercial buildings, are decorated with lights. In Old Bangkok (Rattanakosin) in particular, around the royal palace, you will see lavish light displays on trees, buildings, and the roads. The **Queen's Birthday** (12 Aug) is Mother's Day, and is celebrated similarly if with a little less pomp.

Tourist information

- Tourism Thailand (<https://www.tourismthailand.org/>) website

Talk

See also: *Thai phrasebook*

The official language of Thailand is **Thai** (ภาษาไทย *phaasǎa Thai*). It is a tonal language, so it can be difficult for native English speakers to learn quickly, but everyone will appreciate any attempt you make. Thai is a language with many dialects, though the Bangkok dialect, also known as Central Thai, is used as the standard and is taught in all schools. Language schools can be found in all larger Thai cities, including Bangkok and Phuket.

In the Muslim-dominated south, dialects of Malay that are largely incomprehensible to speakers of standard Malay/Indonesian but essentially the same as Kelantanese are spoken. Unlike in Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia, the Roman alphabet is not used to write Malay in Thailand, and Thai-Malays use the Arabic-based Jawi script exclusively.

Various dialects of Chinese are spoken by the ethnic Chinese community, with Teochew being the dominant dialect in Bangkok's Chinatown. Down south in Hat Yai, Hokkien is also widely understood due to the large number of tourists from Penang. Some people in villages near the Burmese border in the North are descended from Kuomintang refugees from Yunnan and hence, speak the Yunnan dialect of Mandarin. The eastern Isaan dialects are closely related to Lao and there are dozens of small language groups in the tribal areas of the north, some so remote that Thai speakers are few and far between.

Public signage is generally bilingual, written in both Thai and English. There is also some prevalence of Japanese and Chinese signs. Where there is English, it will usually be fairly phonetic - for example "Sawatdee" (meaning *hello*) is pronounced just as it reads: sa-wat-dee. There is no universal agreement on how to transcribe Thai letters into English (RTGS however, is a kind of semi-official system), so Khao San Road for example is also commonly spelled Kao Sarn, Kao Sahn, Khao San, Koh Saan, Khaosan, and many other variations. And ถนน can be *transcribed* as **Thanon** before the name, or *translated* as **Road** or **Street** after the name. Maps with names in both Thai and English make it easier for locals to try and help you.



Bilingual street sign, showing Khao San Road as it is spelled locally

Although **English** is taught in Thai schools, proficiency is generally poor. Some may even deny that they know it; Thais are generally self-conscious about their language skills. Try to be patient, understanding, and encouraging. That said, most well-educated upper class Thais speak a basic conversational level of English.

Most "front desk" people in the travel industry speak at least enough English to communicate, and many are relatively fluent; some also speak one or more other languages popular with their clientèle, such as Chinese, Japanese, German, etc.

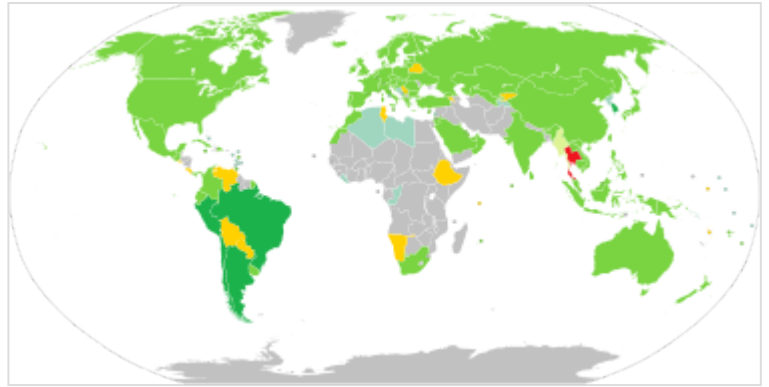
Get in

Entry requirements

Citizens of the following countries may enter Thailand for tourism **visa-free** for up to the following number of days:

- 14 days: Cambodia, Myanmar (for entry *by air* only).
- 30 days: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Brunei, Canada, China (mainland) (limited to a total of 90 days in any 180-day period), Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, India (until May 10,

2024), Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan (until 29 February 2024), Kuwait, Laos, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macau, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Monaco, Mongolia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Russia, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States and Vietnam.



A map showing the visa requirements of Thailand, with countries various shades of green having visa-free access; and countries in yellow having visa on arrival

- 90 days: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru and South Korea.

Check the latest information from the *Official Website of Thailand Electronic Visa* (<https://www.thaievisa.go.th/>). The visa exemption is only granted up to twice per calendar year if entering by land or sea.

Citizens of the following countries may apply for a **visa-on-arrival** for a stay of up to 30 days: Bulgaria, Bhutan, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Fiji, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Malta, Mexico, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Romania, Taiwan, Uzbekistan and Vanuatu

The visa-on-arrival costs 2,000 baht. Travelers using the visa-on-arrival facility need to provide more documentation than visa-free travelers, and are only allowed to use specific entry points (which includes all international airports and the major land border crossings). You will need to present a passport-sized photograph taken within the last 6 months, a confirmed ticket out of Thailand, a confirmed accommodating booking in Thailand, and show evidence of sufficient finances to cover your stay (at least 10,000 baht per individual or 20,000 baht per family).

Those with passports from countries not widely known, including European city-states, or that have problems with document forgery, should obtain a visa in advance from the nearest Thai embassy. This is true even if visa on arrival is permitted. There are reports of tourists being detained using valid passports not commonly presented in Thailand. In addition, ask for a business card from the person or embassy which granted the visa, so they may be contacted on arrival, if necessary. Anyone whose nationality does not have its own embassy in Bangkok, should find out which third country represents your interests there, along with local contact information.

Those arriving via air from most African and South American countries are required to show yellow fever certificates and receive a stamp on their entry forms from the onsite health centre prior to clearing immigration.

Proof of onward travel, long happily ignored by Thai immigration, has been known to be strictly applied in some instances. Airlines, that have to pay for your return flight if immigration doesn't let you in, are more rigorous about checking for it. A print-out of an e-ticket on a budget airline is sufficient to convince the enforcers, but those planning on continuing by land may have to get a little creative. Buying a fully refundable ticket and getting it refunded once in Thailand is also an option. Land crossings, on the other hand, are a very straightforward process and no proof of onward journey required (unless the border officials decide otherwise).

Whether travelers are allowed to enter, pulled aside for questioning, deported or worse depends on the border official. In any case, it's safer to be apologetic to avoid escalating the situation: **your freedom may depend on this**. This applies especially if you have spent significant time in Thailand, but in a less likely scenario may happen to an infrequent traveler, particularly at immigration checkpoints of airports in Bangkok. Border officials are known to:

- Refuse entry unless the traveler books an onward travel ticket at the border.
- Disregard visas, work permits, visa or visa-exempt stay extensions in travelers' passports (such as those granted by the Thai government earlier in the COVID pandemic), or any other paperwork that one would assume proves a history of legal stay and legal basis for current entry, by assuming those may be fake.
- From a traveler who upon questioning informs officials about working remotely while being in Thailand, require evidence they don't work for Thai businesses (such as a freelancing portfolio, supporting documentation listing former customers, and so on).
- Inform travelers that they've violated the "maximum of 90 days within the last 6 months" rule (even if the passport issuing country is not listed in the relevant category above).
- Subject travelers to impolite and informal treatment, such as calling them rude names.

Overstaying in Thailand is risky. If you make it to Immigration and are fewer than 10 days over, you'll probably be allowed out with a fine of 500 baht per day. However, if for *any* reason you're caught overstaying by the police you'll be carted off to the notoriously unpleasant illegal immigrant holding pens and may be blacklisted from Thailand entirely. For most people it's not worth the risk: get a legal extension or do a visa run to the nearest border instead. Now that the number of visa exemptions at land borders is limited it is even more attractive to visit an immigration office to extend your visa or visa exemption with 30 days.

Thai immigration officers at land border with Malaysia are known to ask foreigners for bribes of about RM2/20 baht per person before they stamp your passport. Immigration officers at airports generally do not ask for bribes.

It is controversial whether you must carry your passport with you at all times, but police are known to have tried to extort bribes for this. In some situations it has proven to be enough to carry a photocopy of the passport ID page and the page with the latest entry stamp.

By plane

The main international airports in Thailand are at **Bangkok** (**BKK** ^{IATA}) and **Phuket** (**HKT** ^{IATA}), which are well-served by intercontinental flights. Practically every airline that flies to Asia also flies into Bangkok, meaning that there is plenty of competition to keep ticket prices down. Bangkok has two major airports: **Suvarnabhumi Airport** (**BKK** ^{IATA}) which is the main airport and serves most full-service carriers, and the older and smaller **Don Mueang International Airport** (**DMK** ^{IATA}) which primarily serves low-cost carriers.



Thai Airways Airbus A380

International airports are also located at **Hat Yai**, **Krabi**, **Ko Samui** and **Chiang Mai**, though these are largely restricted to flights from other Southeast Asian countries. Kuala Lumpur and Singapore make excellent places to catch flights into these smaller Thai cities, meaning you can skip the ever-present touts

and queues at Bangkok. During the winter high season, there are also many chartered services directly from European cities to beach destinations like Phuket and Krabi, but they can usually be booked only via travel agencies as part of a packaged tour.

The national carrier is the well-regarded **Thai Airways** (<https://www.thaiairways.com/>), with **Bangkok Airways** (<http://www.bangkokair.com>) filling in some gaps in the region. Bangkok Airways offers free Internet access while you wait for boarding to start at your gate. In addition, Malaysian discount carrier **AirAsia** (<http://www.airasia.com/th/en/home.page>) has also set up a subsidiary in Thailand, and is often the cheapest option for flights into Thailand.

For a full at-a-glance list of all Thai-based carriers, see the **Thai airlines** section (below).

By road

As traffic moves on the left in Thailand, but moves on the right in all the neighbouring countries except Malaysia, you will generally need to change sides of the road when crossing an international border into Thailand.

Cambodia - six international border crossings. The main crossing is the **Poipet-Aranyaprathet** border crossing on the main road between Siem Reap and Bangkok. However, the queues at Poipet are notoriously long, and the crossing is also a hotbed of corruption and scam artists; the other crossings like Koh Kong / Hat Lek on the southern route from Sihanoukville to Trat are much quieter and less stressful. The land borders close for the night. Bus companies often charge a "service fee" for crossing the border, in which case company staff will take your passport and process you through immigration and customs, with any potential bribes already included in the service fee.

Laos - the busiest border crossing is at the Friendship Bridge across the Mekong between Nong Khai and the Lao capital Vientiane. It's also possible to cross the Mekong at Chiang Khong / Huay Xai, Nakhon Phanom / Tha Khaek, Mukdahan / Savannakhet, Ban Pangmon / Ban Huak and elsewhere.

- Vientiane / Udon Thani - A bus service runs from the Morning Market bus station in Vientiane to the bus station in Udon Thani. The cost is 80 baht or 22,000 kip and the journey takes two hours. The Udon Thani airport is 30 minutes by tuk-tuk from the bus station and is served by Thai Airways, Nok Air, and Air Asia.

Malaysia and **Singapore** - driving up is entirely possible, although not with a rented vehicle. The main crossing is the **Bukit Kayu Hitam-Sadao** border crossing at the northern end of Malaysia's North-South Expressway, connecting to the main road to Hat Yai on the Thai side. Other crossings (with the name of the town on Malaysian side in brackets) are at Wang Prachan (Wang Kelian) in Satun Province, Padang Besar (Padang Besar) in Songkhla Province, Betong (Pengkalan Hulu) in Yala Province, and Sungai Kolok (Rantau Panjang) in Narathiwat Province. There are regular buses from Singapore to the southern hub of Hat Yai and vice versa. Thai immigration at the Malaysian border has long been known to demand a bribe of 20 baht/RM2 per person to stamp you in or out, though there has been a crackdown on this. Instead, there is now an official fee if you are crossing the border at peak times (05:00-08:30, 12:00-13:00 or 16:30-21:00 on weekdays, and all day on weekends and both Malaysian and Thai public holidays); this is 25 baht for the driver and 5 baht for each passenger if crossing the border by car, and 10 baht for the rider and 3 baht for the pillion if crossing by motorcycle. No fee is payable if you are walking across the border.

Myanmar - Four border crossings with Myanmar open to foreigners are located at Mae Sai/Tachileik, Mae Sot/Myawaddy, the Three Pagodas Pass (Sangkhlaburi/Payathonzu) and Ban Phunamron/Htee Kee. Just make sure that both your Thai (if required) and Burmese visas are in order, as no visa-on-arrival is available at the border. Land travel to or from Yangon may or may not be possible depending on the security situation.

By train

Malaysia: Overnight trains to Bangkok run from the Malaysian border town of Padang Besar, where you can connect from Malaysian services from Butterworth (for Penang), Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore. There are two Padang Besar stations, one in Malaysia and one in Thailand; both Malaysian and Thai immigration are located at the Malaysian station, which is also where transfers between Malaysian and Thai trains take place. Tickets are cheap even in first class sleepers, but it can be a slow ride. What is a 2-hour flight from Singapore will take you close to 48 hours by rail, as you have to change trains three times. The luxury option is to take the Eastern & Oriental Express (<https://www.belmond.com/trains/asia/eastern-and-oriental-express/>), a refurbished super-luxury train that runs from Singapore to Bangkok once per week, with gourmet dining, personal butler service, and every other colonial perk you can think of. However, at around USD1,000 one-way just from Bangkok to Butterworth, it is approximately 30 times more expensive than an ordinary first-class sleeper!

Laos: A link across the Mekong to Laos opened in March 2009, with twice daily shuttle services between Nong Khai on the Thai side to Thanaleng (near Vientiane) on the Lao side, and the shuttles timed for connections to and from the Bangkok-Nong Khai train. The Kunming-Vientiane railway line from China, which was completed in 2021, is being extended to Bangkok but completion is still years away.

Cambodia: While you can't get to Cambodia by train, you can get very close, with a railway line from Bangkok to Ban Klong Luk station in Aranyaprathet at the Cambodian border, where you can cross into Poipet on foot.

Myanmar: There are no rail services across the border, but the Thai part of the infamous Burma Death Railway is still operating near Kanchanaburi.

By boat

It is possible to travel by ferries in high season (Nov-May) from Phuket and island hop your way down the coast all the way to Indonesia.

This can now be done without ever touching the mainland,

Phuket (Thailand) to Penang (Malaysia), islands en route:

- Ko Phi Phi
- Ko Lanta
- Ko Ngai
- Ko Mook
- Ko Bulon
- Ko Lipe— Ko Lipe being the hub on the border between Thailand and Malaysia having a Thai immigration office.

- Langkawi- Malaysian immigration here.
- Penang

The Thai portion can be done in a day.

Ferries cross from Satun in southern Thailand to the Malaysian island of Langkawi, while over in Narathiwat Province, a vehicular ferry shuttles between Tak Bai and Pengkalan Kubur, near Kota Bharu in Malaysia's Kelantan state.

There are also occasional cruises from Malaysia and Singapore to Phuket and Bangkok, however the main operator Star Cruises collapsed in 2022.

Small wooden longtail boats shuttle between Kawthoung in Myanmar and Ranong. There is no fixed schedule. You negotiate directly with the boat operator, and leave once a price has been agreed upon. Be sure to bargain hard, or you might get ripped off. Boat operators may try to hustle you onto the boat before you find the immigration office but **do not let them do so**, as you will be departing the country illegally. Ensure you get stamped out before getting on the boat.

Get around

Thailand is a large country, but the good news is that there are plenty of affordable and comfortable ways to get around. Domestic flights are a good option for lengthy trips like Bangkok to Phuket or Chiang Mai, with very competitive fares on the main routes if booked in advance, while plush VIP intercity buses ply the highways to every city of any size and there's a reasonable train network as well.

Renting a car or motorbike to drive yourself is a more questionable proposition, since while the road network is quite good, Thailand's traffic safety record has a lot of room for improvement and large cities, especially Bangkok, are snarled in perpetual traffic jams. Nevertheless, rentals for a step-in 125/150cc bike start from about 1000 baht/week including helmet, making this an attractive option to get around and explore nearby areas. Most any hotel or lodging will be more than happy to help you arrange a rental.

By plane

If sitting in a bus for 11 hours is not your idea of a fun time, you may well want to consider domestic flights, which can whisk you from Bangkok to anywhere in the country in an hour. Never terribly expensive to begin with (at least by Western standards), the deregulation of the industry has brought in a crop of new operators: with a little research, it's possible to fly pretty much anywhere in the country for less than 2,000 baht. On highly competitive routes like Bangkok to Phuket it is possible to fly for less than a bus ticket if you book in advance. Various taxes and (often hefty) surcharges are invariably added to advertised prices. Don't forget to bring the credit card you used to book the ticket, as these are sometimes required when checking in.



A Bangkok Airways plane



While most flights still lead to Bangkok, popular regional hubs like Chiang Mai and Phuket are well connected to the entire country. The budget airlines are also selling 'flights' that are actually packages combining flights with ferry and bus transfers to extend their reach to destinations without usable airports. Few airlines limit themselves to domestic operations; you are likely to find that some budget airline offers better connections to Myanmar or China. The numerous airlines and changing routes make flight price comparison websites useful as long as you buy tickets directly from the airline; you are not going to get Thai budget airline tickets cheaper through a third party.

Thai airlines

Pan-ASEAN low-cost carrier **AirAsia** (<https://www.airasia.com>) has great coverage of international and domestic routes in Thailand and offers steeply discounted tickets if booked well in advance; however, prices rise steadily as planes fill up. It's often the cheapest option, sometimes even cheaper than bus or train, if booked at least a week or two in advance. They fly their A320s from Bangkok to a number of places domestically, and to Cambodia, China, Macau, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Vietnam and Indonesia. Their website displays "all-inclusive" prices during booking (which, however, still do not include optional surcharges such as baggage fees). On-line booking is straightforward and can be done even using the mobile phone, but must be done at least 24 hours in advance; ticket sales at the check-in desk close one hour before the departure time.

Bangkok Airways (<https://www.bangkokair.com>) promotes itself as "Asia's Boutique Airline", and has a monopoly on flights to its own airports at Ko Samui (now shared with Thai Airways), Sukhothai, and Trat. Quite an expensive and "posh" option, although the fares are "all-inclusive" with no need to pay extra for baggage, meals and even airport lounge access, which is afforded to all Economy Class passengers.

Nok Air (<https://www.nokair.com>) took to the skies in 2004 sporting lurid paint schemes with a bird's beak painted on the nose. Owned mostly by Thai Airways, they compete with Air Asia on price and, with a fairly comprehensive domestic network, are a pretty good choice overall. They ran into some serious turbulence in 2008, cutting their flights by two-thirds, but now seem to have recovered.

Thai Airways International (<https://www.thaiairways.com/>) is the most reliable, frequent, and comfortable Thai airline, but usually more expensive than the alternatives (look for their promotions). Travel agents often sell only Thai Airways (and Bangkok Airways) tickets; you can also book on-line. Thai Airways is a member of Star Alliance; all domestic flights, except some promotional fares, give at least 500 Star Alliance miles, which may (partially) compensate the price difference.

Thai Lion Air (<https://www.lionairthai.com/en/>) is a budget airline as an offshoot of the Indonesian Lion Air. It still runs aggressive price promotions on most popular routes but you may have to fly very late or very early with inconvenient airport transfers.

Thai VietJet Air (<https://vietjetair.com>) operates flights on behalf of the Vietnamese VietJet Air using Suvarnabhumi as its hub.

By train

State Railway of Thailand (<https://www.railway.co.th/home/Default.aspx?language=Eng>) (SRT) has a 4,000-km network covering most of the country, from Chiang Mai in the north all the way to (and beyond) the Malaysian border in the south. Compared to buses, most trains are relatively slow and prone to delays, but safer. You can pick up fruit, snacks and cooked food from vendors at most stations. With the arrival of new carriages, the railway's premier intercity and sleeper trains are the most comfortable way to travel around Thailand if time is not an issue; First Class accommodation is in high demand at least between Bangkok and Chiang Mai, and must be booked well in advance.

Point-to-point fares depend on the type (speed) of the train and the class of the carriage. There are three classes of service:

- **First class** (*chan neung*) 2-berth sleeping compartments with individually regulated air conditioning are available on some trains, but prices are sometimes matched by budget airfares. On the popular Bangkok to Chiang Mai route, these sleeping compartments sell out as soon as tickets go onsale.
- **Second class** (*chan song*) is a good compromise, costing about the same as 1st class bus tickets and with a comparable level of comfort. Second class is divided into four different subclasses - non-air-conditioned seating, air-conditioned seating, non-air-conditioned open-section sleeper berths and air-conditioned open sleeper berths, with each subclass having different fares and not all of them being available on every train. Seats are made into beds by your attendant. Purchasing an upper berth ticket is always about 10% cheaper than a lower berth ticket. This is because the upper berth is narrower and does not have a window. Also included in this category are the Express Diesel Railcar services, fully air-conditioned day-trains with reclining seats and airline-style meals included in the fare; unlike all other Thai passenger trains, they can match buses for speed, but cannot carry bicycles.
- **Third class** (*chan saam*) is the cheapest way to travel in Thailand, with virtually nominal fares, and can be great fun. As a *farang* (foreigner) you're guaranteed to be the centre of attention, so be prepared. Some 3rd class trains have wooden seats, others are upholstered; some services can be pre-booked, others cannot; refreshments are available from hawkers who roam the aisles. No air-conditioning, but since there are fans in the ceiling and the cars are lined with huge, wide-open windows, so there's plenty of wind. It's only really hot under the midday sun and when the train is stopped.

Tickets may be purchased on-line from the official SRT ticketing site D-Ticket (<https://www.dticket.railway.co.th>) or various resellers such as 12go. Tickets may be purchased from 60 days in advance to two hours before departure. Within Thailand, the 24-hour SRT hotline is 1690 and they have English-speaking operators. Reserved tickets must be paid for at one of the larger train stations in Bangkok by 22:00 the



SRT railway network

next day. This service is not available outside of Bangkok. The official D-Ticket website is not easy to use: tourists report problems with incomplete translations on the English version of the website, as well as with registering an account and setting up payment methods. If you search for Bangkok on D-Ticket, no trains will be found (January 2023). This is because from 19/01/23, SRT trains leave bangkok from the new Krung Thep Aphiwat station, so use this name to search for Bangkok trains. As a result, some tourists prefer to buy from agents like 12go, that have easy-to-use websites and English-speaking customer service. Agents all charge extra fees for their services.

You can ship your motorbike on the same train on which you travel. All trains do not have baggage cars, so check with the ticket office. Shipping costs for motorbikes are roughly equivalent to the price of a first-class ticket on the same train. You can take your bicycle on any train for a fixed fee of 90 baht. You can change tickets at the station (not less than 1 hour before your original train's departure) for a small fee. Tickets are also refundable: the fee for refunding a ticket more than 3 days prior to departure is 20% of the ticket price; the fee for refunding between 3 days and 1 hour before departure is 50%.

Full information regarding routes, timetables and up-to-date ticket costs along with interesting videos can be found at [seat61.com](http://www.seat61.com/Thailand.htm#.UPuwkR1wqZ8) (<http://www.seat61.com/Thailand.htm#.UPuwkR1wqZ8>).

By road

Thailand's roads are head and shoulders above those of its neighbors Myanmar, Laos or Cambodia, and they have seen major improvements since the late 2010s. However, driving habits are still quite dangerous. **Drunk driving**, **speeding** and **reckless passing** are common, and bus and taxi drivers (especially for private companies) work inhuman shifts and often take drugs to keep themselves awake, with predictable and tragic results. Lately, road blocks and strict policing are being implemented quite often in an attempt to address the situation but it may still take some time for the results to start bearing fruit. There are an estimated 24,000 fatalities on Thai roads annually. It's common for motorbikes — even police! — to drive close to the curb **on the wrong side of the road**. Death tolls sky-rocket around major holidays, especially Songkran, when bystanders often throw water on passing cars and bikes. Many drivers forget to switch on headlights at night, multiplying risks, and it is wise to **avoid or minimize overnight travel** by road.

Unlike in its neighbours (except Malaysia), traffic moves on the left side of the road in Thailand and Thai cars are generally right-hand drive. Most official road directional signs are bilingual and written in both Thai and English.

Renting a car to explore on your own is a cost-effective way of getting off the beaten track if you are with a 4-person group, and will avoid the constant hassle of haggling with local taxi/tuk-tuk drivers. Most major roads are marked in both Thai and English and traffic culture is not as bad as some might lead you to believe. Keep a sharp lookout in both mirrors from passing traffic including 18-wheelers and scooters. If you travel with one companion and have a motorbike license, it's worth it exploring the possibilities of using small automatic gearbox 125/150cc step-on bikes to do shorter local excursions and use other mass means of transport for longer travel distances between cities and towns. It's quite safe to use these bikes and it allows one to appreciate the landscapes, if you stick to moderate speeds and keep to the left hand side of the road, like the local bikers do.

Traffic on major highways moves at 100-120 km/h, while smaller highways are generally 80 km/h. Gas stations are common and most Thai are more than willing to give directions in spite of any language barriers.

Drive very defensively at first and watch what the locals do. Of course, it helps if you are accustomed to driving on the left side of the road, which in itself could be enough to distract some Western drivers.

Driving under the influence of alcohol is illegal and dangerous, and driving at night also increased the risk of accidents — even if you're sober, many others aren't.

If you're traveling by public conveyance-bus, train, airplane-you may be shocked at the difference in cost between long distance and local travel. A 119 km journey between Khon Kaen and Udon Thani in a minivan costs 84 baht, or 0.71 baht per kilometre. Traveling the three kilometres from the bus station to a hotel will cost 60-100 baht, or 20-33 baht per kilometre

Rental cars

Renting a car usually costs between 1,200-1,500 baht if you want to go for an economical one like a Toyota Vios. Most international companies can be found in Thailand. Also check guides to particular cities for reputable local car rental companies, which are often a little cheaper. You can choose among international companies such as Budget (<http://www.budget.co.th>), Avis (<http://www.avisthailand.com>) or you can choose to book with local company like www.thailandcarsrentals.com (<http://www.thailandcarsrentals.com/>). Check the documentation and make sure that everything is done according to rules. Perform required checks and notify the car company about any damage before using the vehicle.

Bus

Buses travel throughout the country and the government's bus company **BKS** (บขส Baw Kaw Saw), known in English simply as the **Transport Company** (<http://home.transport.co.th/>), has a terminal in every province of any size.

Generally speaking, BKS buses are a good option for both price and comfort. There are also private buses sanctioned by BKS, which operate on the same routes from the same terminals with the same fares, and these are also fine. The ones to watch out for are the illegal bus companies, which operate from tourist areas (especially Khao San Road) and subsidize slightly cheaper tickets with worse amenities, schedules and safety. In particular, beware of non-government "VIP" buses, which often turn out to be cramped minivans - and you'll only find this out after paying in advance.

The basic BKS bus types, from the most luxurious to the most basic, are:

- **VIP** - Blue and white/silver with a pink stripe, 32 seats or less, reclining seats (typically 135 degrees) with good legroom. Generally take the most direct routes and make very few stops. Always air-conditioned, freshly laundered shrink-wrapped blanket, water and a snack provided. On overnight trips, a Thai meal at a long (25-30 minutes) stop in the middle of the night is normally included, a small separate ticket (written entirely in Thai) is often given at the start of the journey for that purpose; if not, just follow the other passengers. Toilet on board for all but the shortest services. Somewhat (25-30%, which amounts to 100-180 baht for a typical overnight route) more expensive than the first class. Available only on more busy routes, like Bangkok to Chiang Mai or Phuket.

- **First class** (ชั้น 1 *chan neung*) - Blue and white. As fast and almost as comfortable as VIP buses, with otherwise identical services, but packs in around 40 seats with a little less recline, sometimes up to 60 on double-decker services. Good enough and often the best class available for medium- to long-distance trips.
- **Second class** (ชั้น 2 *chan song*) - Blue and white with a prominent red stripe, usually 45-48 seats per bus, air conditioned (some provide blankets, some do not). Often takes a less direct route than 1st class/VIP and has more stops. Most have no on-board toilet, although the frequent stops mean this isn't a problem. Not much (10-20%) cheaper than the First class, and significantly slower, worth using if there's no better choice available to your destination.
- **Express** (*rot duan*) - Identifiable by their orange/red colour. Despite the name, these are slower than any of the options above, and only barely faster than local buses. Size varies, with the largest having around 65 seats (five seats per row) as well as an open space across the width of the bus by the back door for you to sling your backpack, bicycle, sack of rice, live chickens, etc. Not air conditioned.
- **Local** - Very slow, can be cramped when full (nevertheless there's always room for one more), and stop at every village and cowshed along the way. Many are of larger *songthaew* flavour. Not suitable for long-distance travel, but may be the only cheap way to get around locally.

BKS bus types



On board a VIP bus from Bangkok to Phuket



1st class intercity bus in Krabi



2nd class intercity bus in Rayong



Local bus in Chiang Saen

A particular bus *always* operates on the same route, so the route is often painted onto the bus itself. While signage up front may be only written in Thai, especially on local services, on BKS buses the destinations are always stenciled onto the side in English as well. Some buses may have TVs and sound systems blaring, so earplugs are well worth having, just in case. On long-haul buses, if your ticket allocates you a front seat, you may have to switch seats if a monk boards.

If you are travelling a long distance on a daytime bus, take a minute to figure out the sunny side and the shady side of the bus. For example, going from Chiang Mai to Bangkok on a 09:00 bus (south), seats on the right side will be bathed in sunlight all day (curtains are provided), so the left side is preferred by most.

Tickets for BKS buses can be booked online directly at the [official website \(https://tcl99web.transport.co.th/Home\)](https://tcl99web.transport.co.th/Home). For other companies, travel agencies and online ticketing systems such as [12go.asia \(http://12go.o.asia\)](http://12go.o.asia) can be useful. Other reputable tour bus companies include:

- Green Bus Corporation (<http://www.greenbusthailand.com/website/en/>) (Chiang Mai-based).
- Nakhonchaiair Co., Ltd. (<http://www2.nakhonchaiair.com/>)
- Phetprasert (<http://www.phetprasert.com>)
- Sombat Tour Co., Ltd. (<http://www.sombattour.com/>)

A word of warning: travel agencies, particularly those on Bangkok's Khao San Road, are keen to sell you **VIP** bus tickets. Despite the name, these private buses are often inferior to the public ones: it's not uncommon to end up in some cramped minivan and have to change several times along the way, and theft can be a problem as well. It's better to do as the Thais do and stick to public buses, but if you must, keep your valuables with you and don't put anything you can't afford to lose in the storage under the bus.


Minivan

Minivan services are ubiquitous, although under the radar as minivans typically are anonymous grey Toyota vans with no company markings. They serve shorter routes, such as Krabi to Phuket, about 180 km or Bangkok to Hua Hin, about 200 km. The purported advantage of taking a minibus is speed, as they move quickly once they get going. Disadvantages are that they are expensive compared with standard bus travel, they can be uncomfortable as they are usually crammed full, and they offer little room for luggage. Take minivans from bus stations. Do not take minivans that offer to pick you up at your hotel. They will pick you up, but then you will spend the next hour driving to other hotels to pick up more passengers. You will then be driven to an aggregator where all the collected passengers will disembark to wait for the minivan to their respective destinations. Then you will likely be driven to a bus station to change to a third and final minivan. Better just to sleep in, then go to bus station to book your (cheaper) minivan ticket, thus saving 2 hours of pointless discomfort.

Songthaew

A **songthaew** (สอ๓๓๓) is a truck-based vehicle with a pair of bench seats in the back, one on either side — hence the name, which means "two rows" in Thai. In English tourist literature, they're occasionally called "minibuses". By far the most common type is based on a pick-up truck and has a roof and open sides. Larger types start life as small lorries, and may have windows, and an additional central bench; smaller types are converted micro-vans, with a front bench facing backwards and a rear bench facing forwards.



A typical rural *songthaew*, [Mae Salong](#) 

Songthaews are operated extensively as local buses (generally the most economical way to travel shorter distances) and also as taxis; sometimes the same vehicle will be used for both. Be careful if asking a songthaew to take you to someplace if there is nobody in the back, the driver might charge you the taxi price. In this case, check the price of the ride before embarking.

Tuk-tuk

The name **tuk-tuk** is used to describe a wide variety of small/lightweight vehicles. The vast majority have three wheels; some are entirely purpose-built (e.g., the ubiquitous Bangkok tuk-tuk), others are partially based on motorcycle components (primarily engines, steering, front suspension, fuel tank, drivers seat). A relatively recent development is the four wheeled tuk-tuk (basically a microvan-songthaew) as found in Phuket.



Tuk-tuks on the prowl, Bangkok 

Tuk-tuks are small, noisy, and perhaps dangerous; but possibly the worst thing about them is that, as a passenger, you cannot see a damned thing due to the low roof line. To catch even a glimpse of the passing scene you will find yourself practically supine.

You will often find yourself at the mercy of the tuk-tuk driver when it comes to pricing as you will likely have no clue as to the acceptable *raa kaa Thai* ("Thai price") and will probably have to cough up a *raa kaa farang* ("farang price"). Even if you do know the Thai price, the driver may just not bother to accept it on principle. If you pay with a larger denomination bill, it is also probable that the driver will whine that no change is available. If this happens, try to break the note in a nearby shop.

Taxi

Metered taxis are ubiquitous in Bangkok and starting to become more popular in Chiang Mai, but rare elsewhere in the country. When available, they are an excellent means of transport - insist on the meter. Beware of taxis which idle around touristy areas and wait for people. They are looking for a tourist who will take their taxi without using a meter. Instead, try to flag down a taxi moving down the street, or use a taxi stand where the locals are queueing. Always insist on the meter, and use another taxi if the driver refuses to turn it on. Most drivers do not speak English, so be sure to have your hotel staff write the names of your destinations in Thai to show the driver.

Ride-hailing

The main ride hailing app is **Grab** (<https://www.grab.com/th/en/transport>), which took over Uber's former South-east Asian operations, including that of Thailand. Grab is generally available in larger cities and beach destinations. Grab fares are typically up to 2x as expensive as taxis, but prices are fixed, navigation is easy and you can easily pay by credit card.

Other ride hailing apps include **Bolt** (<https://bolt.eu/en-th/>) and **inDrive** (<https://promo.indrive.com/th/ai/en>). These are typically cheaper than Grab, but are available in fewer cities, and drivers often refuse fares from them as they can make more money off Grab.

Motorbike

As is the case throughout virtually all of Southeast Asia, motorcycles (*motosai*) are the most common form of transport overall; the most popular type are the 100 cc-125 cc step-through models. These are very widely used as taxis, with fares starting from as low as 10 baht. Negotiate the fare with the driver before using the service otherwise you may be charged more than you expect.

Motorcycles can be rented without difficulty in many locations. Rates start at around 125 baht/day for recent 100-125 cc semi-automatic (foot-operated gear change, automatic clutch) step-through models, 150 baht/day for fully automatic scooters; larger capacity models can also easily be found, although the rates reflect the risks: up to around 2,500 baht/day for the very latest model high capacity sport bikes, such as the Honda CBR1000RR. In all cases, lower prices will apply if paying upfront for more than a week or so; in some cases, long-distance travel may be prohibited. Motorcycle rentals do not include insurance, and both motorcycling accidents and motorbike thefts are common.

Many places will rent to you without requiring a license, but legally speaking you **must** have a valid Thai license or International Driver's Permit. Often a deposit will be required; sometimes a passport photocopy, or even the passport itself will be requested (Don't do this. Bargain to leave some baht instead). An International Driver's Permit may be used for a maximum of 90 days; having one might lead to requesting your passport to see the entrance stamp, another reason not to leave your passport at the renting company. Helmets are normally included, but are usually ultra-basic models with very flimsy chin-strap fasteners. If you're intending to travel by motorcycle and have a good quality helmet at home, then bring it with you. If supplied a helmet with a chin-cup (many cheap rental helmets are), slide the cup up the strap out of the way and securely fasten the bare strap directly under the jaw, as this is much safer.

Insurance is usually not included (or even available), so try to ensure in advance that the insurance you leave home with is going to cover you; alternatively, arrange cover with an insurance broker locally in Thailand. If you rent a vehicle without insurance and it's damaged or stolen (take photos of the bike at the time of rental!), the bottom line is that you will be required to **pay in full** the cost of repairing or replacing it. Furthermore, some travel insurance policies will only provide medical cover in the event of an accident if you hold a motorcycle license in your home country.

According to the WHO *Global Status Report on Road Safety 2013*, Thailand in 2010 had 38.1 road fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants. This is the second highest in the world. 74% of those fatalities involved "motorized two or three wheelers". Motorcyclists (including passengers) are required to wear crash helmets and to keep their headlights switched on at all times. Enforcement varies widely, but in tourist areas spot checks for helmets and/or licenses are commonplace. While the fines are light (typically 400 baht) the inconvenience can be considerable as offender's vehicle and/or driver's license is impounded until the fine is paid, and the queue at the police station can be lengthy.

Some border crossings allow motorcycles through. At those which do, documentation including proof of ownership must be produced (with the possible exception of day visits to Payathonzu, Myanmar via Three Pagodas Pass).

Rental car

Driving your own car in Thailand is not for the faint-hearted, and many rental companies can supply drivers at a very reasonable price. Prices without insurance for a self-driven car start from around 800 baht/day for small cars, and from as little as 600 baht/day for open-topped Jeeps. Cars with insurance start at just under 1,000 baht/day, and come down to around 5,600 baht/week or 18,000 baht/month.

Driving is (usually, but not always!) on the left hand side of the road. Fuel at large petrol stations is 37-45 baht/litre. Small kerbside vendors who pump by hand from drums and/or pour from bottles charge a few baht more.

Cars can be rented without difficulty in many locations. It's worth paying a little more than the absolute minimum to use one of the international franchises (e.g. Avis, Budget, and Hertz) to minimize the risk of hassles, and to ensure that any included insurance is actually worth something.

More reputable agencies require that valid licences be produced. Foreigners who do not have a Thai driving licence **must carry a valid International Driving Permit**. Even if you manage to rent a car without an IDP, not having one will invalidate the insurance and count against you in the event of an accident.

A common rental scam involves the owner taking a deposit, and then later refusing to refund it in full on the basis that the customer is responsible for previous damage; the Tourist Police (dial 1155) may be able to help. Another common scam involves the owner having someone follow the rented vehicle and later "steal" it, using a set of spare keys. Always report thefts: a "stolen" vehicle may mysteriously turn up as soon as the police become involved.

By boat

One of the Thais' many names for themselves is *jao naam*, the Water Lords, and from the river expresses of Bangkok to the fishing trawlers of Phuket, boats remain an indispensable way of getting around many parts of the country.

Perhaps the most identifiably Thai boat is the **longtail boat** (*reua hang yao*), a long, narrow wooden boat with the propeller at the end of a long "tail" stretching from the boat. This makes them supremely manoeuvrable even in shallow waters, but they're a little underpowered for longer trips and you'll get wet if it's even a little choppy. Longtails usually act as taxis that can be chartered, although prices vary widely. Figure on 300-400 baht for a few hours' rental, or up to 1,500 baht for a full day. In some locations like Krabi, longtails run along set routes and charge fixed prices per passenger.



Long-tail boats, Ao Nang, Krabi

Modern, air-conditioned speedboat services, sometimes ferries (departure every 30 min) also run from the Surat Thani to popular islands like Ko Samui and Ko Pha Ngan. Truly long-distance services (e.g., Bangkok to any other major city) have, however, effectively ceased to exist as buses, planes, and even trains are faster. Safety measures are rudimentary and ferries and speedboats do sink occasionally, so avoid overloaded ships in poor weather, and scope out the nearest life jackets when on board. As of November 2018, ferry service is available (<https://thethaiger.com/thai-life/travel/pattaya-hua-hin-ferry-service-back-again-for-high-season>) between Hua Hin and Pattaya, a 2.5-hour journey for 1,250 Thai Baht on a catamaran with a maximum capacity of 340.

Also, the Seahorse Ferry runs between Sattahip and Songkhla, but it has been in "annual conditioning" since July 2023. Supposedly, it will resume service as quickly as possible.

By thumb

Thailand is an easy country to hitch-hike in and a great way to experience the non-touristy side of the country. While train is generally quite cheap, compared to other modes of (tourist) transport this can be a good way of travelling on a shoe-string. Sometimes you won't even have to out up you thumb, locals seeing some Westerners walking in the scorching sun the Buddhist attitude will often have them stopping and trying to help.

In general, you should avoid large highways though where it is hard for people to stop. Also, it seems two people (even guys) are more likely to be picked up than one.

Note, it is not unusual for people to invite you to ride on their (sometimes dirty) pickup's load area and you will see many Thais doing the same. If this is an issue for you, it's better not to hitch-hike in Thailand.

See

Historical and cultural attractions

Bangkok is at the start of many visitors' itineraries, and while a modern city, it has a rich cultural heritage. Most visitors at least take in the Grand Palace, a collection of highly decorated buildings and monuments. It is home to Wat Phra Kaew, the most sacred Buddhist temple in Thailand that houses the Emerald Buddha. Other cultural attractions include Wat Pho, Wat Arun and Jim Thompson's House, but these are just a fraction of possible sights you could visit.

The former capitals of Siam, Ayutthaya and Sukhothai, make excellent stops for those interested in Thai history. The latter could be combined with a visit to Si Satchanalai and Kamphaeng Phet, all of which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Khmer architecture is mostly found in Isaan, with the historical remains of Phimai and Phanom Rung being the most significant.

In the northern provinces live unique hill-tribe peoples, often visited as part of a trek. The six major hill tribes in Thailand are the Akha, Lahu, Karen, Hmong, Mien and Lisu, each with a distinct language and culture. Chiang Mai makes a good base for arranging these treks, and has some cultural sights of its own, such as Wat Doi Suthep.

Kanchanaburi has a lot of sights related to World War II. The Bridge over the River Kwai, popularised by the film of the same name, is the most famous one, but the museums in its vicinity are a lot more moving. "The Dead Railway" (tang

What's what in a Wat

A Thai temple is known as a "Wat". Usually a temple does not consist of one building, but is a collection of buildings, shrines and monuments enclosed by a wall. There are thousands of temples in Thailand, and nearly every town or village has at least one. The word "Wat" (วัด) literally means school, and the temple has been the only place where formal education took place for centuries. A typical Buddhist Wat consists of the following structures:

- **Ubosot** — Also written as *Bot*. The holiest prayer building, usually only open to the monks on special occasions. It is architecturally similar to the Wihan, but is usually more heavily decorated and it has eight cornerstones to ward off evil. It is also known as the "ordination hall" as it is where the monks take their vows. If opened to the public, some abbots have the Ubosot of their Wat closed to women. An Ubosot is not always present in a Wat.
- **Wihan** — Also written as *Viharn* or *Vihara*. Usually the

rod fai sai morana) is the railway constructed by captive allied soldiers during World War II. This railway has a nice view all along its route.

Beaches and islands

Thailand's beaches and islands attract millions of visitors each year from all over the globe. Hua Hin is Thailand's oldest beach resort, made famous by King Rama VII in the 1920s as an ideal getaway from Bangkok. Things have considerably changed since then. Pattaya, Phuket, and Ko Samui only came to prominence in the 1970s, and these are now by far the most developed beach resorts.

Krabi Province has some beautiful spots, including Ao Nang, Rai Leh and the long golden beaches of Ko Lanta. Ko Phi Phi, renowned as a true island paradise, has been undergoing massive development since the release of the film *The Beach* in 2000. Ko Pha Ngan offers the best of both worlds, with both well-developed beaches and empty ones a short ride away. It is also where the infamous "Full Moon Party" takes place.

Ko Chang is a bit like Ko Samui used to be. It has a backpacker vibe, but is fairly laid-back and there is accommodation in all price ranges. If you're looking for unspoiled beaches, Ko Kut is very thinly populated, but also difficult to explore. Ko Samet is the closest island beach to Bangkok, but its northern beaches are quite developed and hotels are pretty much sold out on weekends and public holidays.

Natural scenery

While not as beautiful as Malaysia or Indonesia, Thailand does have its fair share of **tropical forest**. Khao Yai National Park, the first national park of Thailand, is the closest to Bangkok. Wild tigers and elephants are increasingly rare, but you can't miss the macaques, gibbons, deer, and species of birds.

The stretch of jungle at Khao Sok National Park is probably even more impressive, and you can spend the night in the middle of the jungle.

Waterfalls can be found all over Thailand. The Heo Suwat Waterfall in Khao Yai National Park and the 7-tiered Erawan Falls in Kanchanaburi are among the most visited, but the Thee Lor Sue Waterfall in Umphang and the 11-tiered Pa La-u Falls in Kaeng Krachan National Park are equally exciting. Finally,

busiest building in a Wat, it is where the temple's main Buddha image is and where people come to make offerings. It is open for everyone. A Wat can have more than one Wihan.

- **Chedi** or **stupa** — A tall bell-shaped structure that generally houses relics of the Buddha.
- **Prang** — A finger-like spire of Khmer and Ayutthayan origin that serves the same religious purpose as a chedi.
- **Mondop** — An open, square building with four arches and a pyramidal roof. It is often used to worship religious texts or objects.
- **Sala** — An open-sided pavilion that is used for relaxation and as a meeting place (and often used as a shelter for rain).
- **Chofa** — Mostly bird-like decorations on the end of temple roofs. They are meant to represent the Garuda, a mythical creature that is half bird and half man. Other shapes include a Naga head and an Elephant head.



Chaweng beach, Ko Samui



the gravity-defying **limestone formations** of the Phang Nga Bay shouldn't be missed by anyone who stays in the region.

Itineraries

- Chiang Mai to Chiang Rai in 3 days — three-day tour through parts of Northern Thailand that are largely undiscovered by tourists.
- Mae Hong Son Loop — A journey through mountainous Mae Hong Son Province.
- Northern Thailand Loop Tour — Explore the heart of rural northern Thailand.
- One day in Bangkok — if you have just one day to spare and want to catch a feel for the city.
- Rattanakosin Tour — a quick tour along Bangkok's famed historic district.
- Samoeng Loop — a 100 km loop popular with bicyclists and motorcyclists through the mountains starting and ending in Chiang Mai.
- Yaowarat and Phahurat Tour — a full-day walking tour through this multicultural district.

Do

Golf

Golf arrived in Thailand during the reign of King Rama V one hundred years ago. It was first played by nobles and other high society elites, but since then, things have certainly changed. Over the past decade or so, the popularity of golf in Thailand has escalated; it is now popular with Thais and visiting tourists and expatriates.

Catering to the needs of an average of 400,000 foreign golfers coming to Thailand annually, golf in Thailand has turned into a huge local industry with new courses constantly being churned out. Golf alone annually brings 8 billion baht into the local economy. Thailand offers over two hundred courses with high standards. Internationally renowned courses can be found in tourist-spots like Bangkok, Pattaya, and Phuket.

There is an abundance of reasons why golf in Thailand has become so popular. First, if you compare the cost to most golfing countries in the world, membership and course fees are exceptionally low. The general low cost of travel in Thailand itself makes the country ideal for cost-efficiency minded tourists. Also, many of the golf courses in Thailand have been designed by top names in the game such as Jack Nicklaus, Nick Faldo and Greg Norman.

- **Thailand Golf Courses Association**, 96 Moo 3, Viphavadi-Rangsit Rd, Bangkok, ☎ +66 2 6625234.

Outdoors

Thailand's a big enough country, the size of Spain, that you can find a place to practice almost any outdoor sport. Ko Tao is becoming one of Asia's great **scuba diving** centres, with Ang Thong National Marine Park near Ko Samui and the Similan Islands off Khao Lak also drawing crowds. One of the

newest hot spots for diving is Ko Lipe, a small island that is relatively unspoiled with great reefs and stunning beaches. **Snorkelling** can be done at pretty much every beach, but the coral reefs of the Similan Islands stand out as particularly worthwhile.

While Thailand does not match surf paradises like Bali, **surfing** does have its place. The waves are generally small, good for **longboarding** and those wanting to learn to surf. Khao Lak and Phuket's west coast beaches are among the better ones, but the best waves are to be found at the relatively unknown Ko Kradan on the west coast of Trang Province. Other surf-spots include Rayong and Ko Samui, but the waves of the Gulf Coast are less reliable.



Surfing in Phuket



Phang Nga Bay's gravity-defying limestone formations are usually seen with boat tours, but if you go **sea-canoeing**, you can get into areas unexplored by the tourist masses. The limestone cliffs of Rai Leh are among the best in the world for **rock-climbing**.

Pampering

Traditional **Thai massage** has a history of more than 2,500 years. Practitioners of Thai massage operate on the belief that many invisible lines of energy run through the body. The masseur uses his or her hands, elbows, feet, heels and knees to exert pressure on these lines, releasing blockages that may exist, allowing a free flow of energy through the body. Many Thais believe that these massages are beneficial both for treating diseases and aiding general well-being. You're supposed to feel both relaxed and energised after a session.

Although **spas** weren't introduced here until the early 1990s, Thailand has quickly become one of the highest ranking spa destinations in the world. Besides traditional Thai massage, there is a phenomenal variety of international treatments, including aromatherapy, Swedish massage and many others. There is usually an option for every budget, varying from extravagant wellness centres in luxury hotels to the ubiquitous little massage shops found on many street corners.

Traditional games

- **Makruk** (มากรุก) - also known as **Thai chess**. The most popular chess variant in Thailand, where its popularity even eclipses international chess. While it shares the same origin as international chess in the Persian game of shatranj, the rules of makruk are much closer to the original Persian game. You can find people playing the game in the street all over the country, and there are even national tournaments where the best from around the country gather to compete for the title of national champion.

Buy

Money

Exchange rates for Thai baht
As of January 2024:

The currency of Thailand is the **baht**, denoted by the symbol "฿" (ISO code: THB), written in Thai as บาท or บ. Wikivoyage uses "baht" in its articles. It is divided into 100 *satang* (สตางค์). There are six coins and six notes:

- 25 and 50 satang (cent, copper colour) coins - nearly worthless and only readily accepted (and handed out) by buses, supermarkets and 7-Elevens
- 1, 2 (in 2 versions: silver and gold), 5 (silver colour) and 10 baht (silver/gold) coins
- 20 (green), 50 (blue), 100 (red), 500 (purple) and 1,000 (grey-brown) baht notes

There are at least three versions of most bills in circulation, some paper, some polymer, with various portraits of various Thai kings. All retain the same color scheme and all are universally accepted. Be careful accepting 1,000 baht notes, as **counterfeits** are not uncommon: feel the embossing, look for the watermark and tilt to see colour-changing ink (<https://www.bot.or.th/English/Banknotes/Pages/identify.aspx>) to make sure the note is real.

The most useful bills tend to be 20s and 100s, as many small shops and stalls don't carry much change. Taxi drivers also like to pull the "no change" trick; if caught, hop into the nearest convenience store and make a small purchase.

Under no circumstance should you ever mishandle Thai coins and banknotes as they have a portrait of the King. Avoid stepping on them (not even to stop coins from rolling), writing near the king's portrait, throwing them in anger, or folding them improperly. These are considered disrespectful and you may be liable under *lèse-majesté* laws (see Stay Safe section).

Cash advance

While carrying a lot of cash (US dollars, euros, etc.) for currency exchange is generally not a great idea, and ATM withdrawals in Thailand are one of the most expensive ones around the world, *cash advance* (i.e. withdrawing money via the bank counter) seems to be the most economical and reasonable way forward in Thailand, given you have the right credit card. As of Feb 2024, an advantageous German credit card (bank slogan: "Free withdrawals worldwide") allowed cash advance at no extra fee and at interbank exchange rate. Also, N26 does not charge for cash advance.

Only Bangkok Bank seems to universally accept this type of withdrawal, including some of their and other "Exchange" booths. Beware though that many card issuers (i.e. your home bank) do charge significantly more for this operation than for ATM withdrawals, e.g. when using a debit card. Also, make sure that when going with money exchangers that they don't charge your card in your home currency at a very bad rate, see [Money#Dynamic currency conversion](#).

- US\$1 ≈ 34 baht
- €1 ≈ 37 baht
- UK£1 ≈ 43 baht
- AU\$1 ≈ 23 baht
- NZ\$1 ≈ 21.83 baht
- Japanese ¥100 ≈ 24 baht
- Chinese ¥1 ≈ 4.81 baht
- Indian ₹100 ≈ 44 baht
- SG\$1 ≈ 26 baht
- Malaysian RM1 ≈ 7.45 baht

Exchange rates fluctuate. Current rates for these and other currencies are available from [XE.com \(https://www.xe.com/currency/thb-thai-baht\)](https://www.xe.com/currency/thb-thai-baht)

Weighty bahts

Is your new Thai girlfriend asking for a one-baht gold ring? Watch out, as this isn't the cheap trinket it sounds like: for jewellers and goldsmiths, the baht is also a measure of weight, or 15.244 grams (around 0.5 oz). At 2022 gold prices, one baht of gold would thus cost you almost 30,000 baht in cash!

You will need your credit card and passport to withdraw the money over the counter. The bank's operating hours apply — many, but by no way all, branches are also closed on weekends and public holidays.

Don't worry about getting too much cash — any leftover baht can easily be exchanged for hard currency at the Airport Rail Link's last station in Bangkok at excellent rates, see [there](#).

Money exchange

Any of the major currencies can often be exchanged at competitive rates at 0.1-0.2% markup (especially larger notes and mostly in Bangkok).

One notable money exchanger is [SuperRich](https://www.superrich1965.com/) (<https://www.superrich1965.com/>) (not to be confused with the similarly-named [Superrich Thailand](https://www.superrichthailand.com/) (<https://www.superrichthailand.com/>)), with dozens of branches in [Bangkok](#) including at Silom, Ratchadamri, Khao San Road and Chatuchak. No fees are charged and the exchange rate, especially for major currencies, is just 0.1-0.2% off the interbank exchange rate, often better than what your bank offers when you withdraw money from an ATM.

Their success caused a host of competitors to emerge, some of these closely imitating SuperRich, including in the major cities outside of Bangkok, though the rates outside Bangkok are usually not as good. For the best rates, go to the head office (for chains that operate multiple branches across Thailand or Bangkok), present the largest banknote denominations you can (e.g. \$100 for U.S. dollars, £50 for pound sterling, ¥10,000 for Japanese yen), and ensure they are in as pristine condition as possible.

Banks also offer reasonable rates, though normally not as good as the exchangers mentioned before. However, they are less picky about the quality of the notes.

Many hotels and guesthouses will change money for guests, but hefty commissions and poor rates may apply. US dollars in small bills (US\$1, 5, and 20) are invaluable for onward travel to neighbouring countries other than Malaysia, but are only useful in Thailand for exceptional purchases (e.g., paying visa fees for Cambodia).

Thai baht are difficult to exchange outside the neighbouring countries, so try to get rid of your excess baht before you leave.

Credit cards

Cards are widely accepted in the tourist industry such as in restaurants, shopping malls and shops catering to tourists. Fraud is common though, so use them sparingly and tell your bank in advance, so your card doesn't get locked down because *you* are using it. Some businesses add a surcharge (usually 2-3%) if you're paying by credit card; in this case, it can turn out cheaper to pay them in cash.

Just as with ATM withdrawals, you may occasionally be offered the option to have the transaction charged directly into your home currency or Thai baht. In this case, always choose to be charged in Thai baht as the rate offered by the merchant will be less favourable to you.

ATMs

ATMs are everywhere, and international withdrawals are not a problem, besides the fee. An ATM will typically provide a much better exchange rate than many money exchangers, especially if you have a card that does not charge a transaction fee for overseas withdrawals. However, note that there are some money exchangers (especially in Bangkok) that have highly competitive rate, even better than ATM.

There is a 220 baht surcharge for using foreign cards in most ATMs, you will mostly be notified about this fee in any ATM which charges it beforehand. Aeon, which charged only 150 baht before, doesn't seem to accept foreign cards anymore.

Most ATMs have a limit of 20 notes, that is 20,000 baht; Bangkok Bank typically dispenses 25 notes at once, and a few other banks including Krungsri, TMB and CIMB may dispense 30 notes.

The more important thing to watch for is that some ATMs (Krungsri, SCB and a few others are known for that) will offer you to exchange your money to Baht for you, charging your card in USD or your home currency. What you will get if you agree is a very lousy rate (-5% if not more from the mid-market level). So, always refuse and choose to be charged in Thai Baht only, not USD or your home currency. Read more on **Dynamic Currency Conversion**.

Very (very!) remote areas (including smaller islands) do not have banks or ATMs, so entering those places with cash is essential.

Tax refund and VAT

Foreign visitors (with a few exceptions) have the benefit to receive a 7% VAT refund on luxury goods purchased from shops that participate in the 'VAT Refund for Tourists' (<https://www.tourismthailand.org/Articles/plan-your-trip-vat-tax-refund>) scheme. When you see a 'VAT Refund for Tourists' sign, you can receive a 7% refund of the VAT levied on goods at the shop. However, certain conditions apply, and you won't be able to claim your refund until you depart Thailand from an international airport.

The goods must be purchased from participating shops that display a "VAT Refund For Tourists" sign. You may not claim VAT refund for services or goods that you use or "consume" while in Thailand; such as hotel or restaurant expenses. On any one day, the goods purchased from any one individual participating shop must be at least 2,000 baht including VAT. When you purchase the goods, ask the sales assistant to complete a VAT refund form, known as the P.P.10, and attach the original tax/sales invoices to that form. Each P.P.10 must show a value of 2,000 baht or more. You will need to show your passport to the sales assistant when you purchase the goods, to allow her to fill in the above mentioned form. When you exit the country, the goods must be inspected prior to check in and your completed P.P. 10's stamped. Since you must give away the original receipts it is a good idea to take photos or make copies in case you need to prove the value of your purchases to customs officers when going home.

Tipping

Tipping is not common in Thailand and the Thais themselves don't do it. Thais do round up (or down) the taxi fare to get it to an amount that is easier to pay for (such as from 59 or 61 to 60 baht). Sometimes they also leave the change in restaurants, but even this is a rare occurrence.

You don't have to feel odd if you don't tip at all, as that's what the locals do, but the presence of many foreign visitors have changed some expectations. Tipping is now common in many high-end hotels and tourist restaurants. Don't go overboard when tipping — never give more than 50 baht. In some tourist places, especially along Khao San Road, there are even restaurants hinting for a tip. This is not common (and even rude) in Thai culture, so you can easily ignore it.

Do not tip when a customer service charge is applied, as this is supposed to be the tip, applied only in luxury restaurants and hotels.

Costs

Thailand is not as cheap as it used to be, with Bangkok being named the second most expensive city in SE Asia behind Singapore. However, budget travellers who are careful with what they spend will still find that 600–1,000 baht will get a backpacker a dorm bed or cheap room, three square meals a day and leave enough for transport, sightseeing, and even partying — dorm beds start at 250–300 baht and meals at 50–60 baht, even in Bangkok. Doubling that budget will let you stay in decent hotels, and if you're willing to fork out 5,000 baht per day or more you can live like a king.

Bangkok requires a more generous budget than upcountry destinations, but also offers by far the most competitive prices for shoppers who shop around. The most popular tourism islands such as Phuket and Ko Samui tend to have higher prices in general. It is common for tourists to be charged several times the actual price in tourist areas of other places as well. If you want to have an idea what the real Thai prices are, consider visiting malls like Big C, Tesco, or Carrefour where locals and expats routinely shop. Those are available in major cities (in Bangkok, there are dozens of them) and on larger islands such as Phuket or Ko Samui. Tax hikes have made alcohol clearly more expensive than in some neighbouring countries.

Shopping

Thailand is a shopper's paradise and many visitors to Bangkok in particular end up spending much of their time in the countless markets and malls. Particularly good buys are **clothing**, both cheap locally produced street wear and fancy **Thai silk**, and all sorts of **handicrafts**. Electronics and computer gear are also widely available, but prices are slightly higher than in Singapore, Hong Kong, Philippines, and Kuala Lumpur. A good strategy for shopping, is to first go around doing window shopping for a couple of days, don't commit yourself to purchase anything until you have seen enough to be able to make sensible judgements.

The last thing you want is to impulsively buy something today and two days later see the same or similar item selling at a much reduced price elsewhere. Most shopping centers in Bangkok have sales often, but even better is to go a bit out the big city into a place like *Future Park* for example. At the Mo Chit minibus rank next to the public park ask for "Future Park" minibus. Go early, the trip costs 35Baht, takes about half an hour and you get a chance to mix with the real Thais going about their daily lives. Once at *Future Park* shopping complex, its vast multilevel shopping areas go on and on (opens at 10:00, closes at 21:00) and it caters for everyone and everything, cheap and upmarket, from motor vehicles and home appliances, to clothing and furniture, Thai therapy and restaurants. You can spend the day hunting for special deals and shopping with many sales on offer with



Racks of clothing at Siam Square, Bangkok



prices catering for local customers, department stores like **Robinson** are extensive and a bargain hunters paradise. If you get hungry or thirsty, there's plenty of varied restaurants on offer and also a large supermarket within, with a help yourself fresh salads and other foods bar selling food by weight. The main *Zpell* entrance facing the elevated freeway is by the minibus rank and once inside there's an information island desk with English speaking staff at hand, while you can always download a translator app to help you just in case. On returning to central Bangkok, go back to the main minibus rank and ask for the "Mo Chit" vehicle, alternatively, return by taxi cab to central Bangkok (100-120 baht), the better option, if you find yourself carrying lots of shopping.

A Thai speciality is the **night markets** found in almost every town, the largest and best-known of which are in Bangkok and the Night Bazaar in Chiang Mai. Here a variety of vendors from designers to handicraft sellers have stalls selling goods which cannot normally be found in malls and day markets. Most night markets also have large open air food courts attached.

You can also find marvellously tacky modern clothing accessories. Witness pink sandals with clear plastic platform heels filled with fake flowers. Night markets along the main roads and Bangkok's Mahboonkrong (MBK) Mall, near the Siam Skytrain stop, are particularly good sources. Not to be left out is what is often touted as the world's biggest weekend bazaar - **The Chatuchak Weekend Market** or known to locals simply as "JJ" Market. Chatuchak sells a myriad of products ranging from clothes to antiques, covers over 35 acres (1.1 km²) and is growing by the day!

Haggling is the norm and often market and road-side vendors will try to charge you as much as they think you can afford to pay. It's not uncommon to buy something, walk outside, and find somebody who bought the same item for half or one third what you paid (or even less). Try to figure out the item's rough value first. Adjacent stalls, government-run fixed price shops and even hotel gift shops are a good starting point. You'll find that prices drop drastically when the seller realizes you have some idea of what it costs.

Learn

Learning opportunities are abundant in Thailand. There are many good schools (local and international) and universities in Thailand, and the cost of education is relatively affordable. Chulalongkorn University, for example, charges between ~~76,000-133,900 baht~~ per semester.

The Thai educational system emphasises the importance of being connected to Thai language and culture, which are thought of as essential pillars of Thai national identity. While that sounds impressive, the quality of the Thai educational system is best described as poor. High levels of inequality, high levels of teacher debt, and inadequate management contribute to the poor state of the Thai educational system.



Meditating Thai Buddhas



Due to the poor state of the Thai educational system, many Thai families (mainly upper-class Thais) often try to get their children enrolled in one of Thailand's many English-speaking international schools. However, it is next to impossible for them to access such schools, as each international school in Thailand has a strict quota on the number of Thai students they can enrol. In addition, students registered as Thai nationals at international schools are required to study Thai for the duration they are there.

Universities

Thailand has many universities and institutions of higher learning. Many of them conduct classes in English, and the country's top universities are situated in the capital, Bangkok.

University uniforms are standard throughout Thailand and each university has a dress code that must be followed at all times by all students. Women are normally required to wear a white blouse and a black skirt, and men are normally required to wear a white shirt, a necktie, and black trousers. The status of university uniforms is controversial in some circles; some campaign for the abolition of university uniforms.

The most notable universities in Thailand:

- **Chulalongkorn University (<https://www.chula.ac.th/en/>)**. Thailand's most prestigious university.
- **Thammasat University (<https://tu.ac.th/>)**.
- **Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (<https://www.mcu.ac.th/>)**. Thailand's oldest institution of higher learning specialising in Buddhism and religious studies. It focuses mainly on training people to be Buddhist monks, priests, and scholars.
- **Mahidol University (<https://mahidol.ac.th/>)**.
- **Assumption University (<https://www.au.edu/>)**. Thailand's most prestigious private Catholic university. Offers courses in English.
- **Bangkok University (<https://www.bu.ac.th/th/>)**.

Thai language schools

Bangkok has many language schools for studying Thai:

- **AUA (American University Alumni) Language Center Bangkok (<http://auathai.com/>)**
AUA uses a non-traditional method where all teaching is done in Thai without books or any use of English. Students learn by looking and listening and eventually after a certain number of hours are expected to begin to speak Thai "naturally".
- **Duke Language School Bangkok (<http://DukeLanguage.com/>)** Duke Language School is conveniently located near BTS Nana station and has a very high success rate.
- **Chulalongkorn University Intensive Thai classes (<http://www.culi.chula.ac.th/>)**
Intensive Thai courses with an emphasis on learning to read and write academic Thai at a university level.
- **Jentana & Associates Thai Language School (<http://www.thai-lessons.com/>)**
- **Piammitr (Plenty of Friends) Language School Near BTS Asok (<http://www.piammitrschool.com/>)** Courses are 60-hours of class time and last one month.
- **My Thai Language School (<http://www.mythailanguage.com/>)** On Ratchada Rd, you can apply for a student ed Visa
- **Walen School (<http://www.thaiwalen.com/>)**

- **Thai Language (<http://thai-language.com/>)** Reference documents, interactive lessons, dictionary, and forums for learning Thai

Work



WARNING: Overseas job scams are rampant in Thailand. Thailand has also become an important transit point for human trafficking rings to the rest of Southeast Asia. People are lured in by offers of a high-paid job with little to no experience or work visa needed, then held hostage under threats of violence and forced to work in call centers, online gambling, etc. See [Human trafficking](#) for details. **Chinese speakers** are most frequently targeted, but others have been trapped as well. If you or somebody you know have been caught in this scam, contact your country's [diplomatic mission](#).

Government travel advisories

Hong Kong (<https://www.sb.gov.hk/eng/ota/info-overseasjobscam.html>)

Thailand has long been known as a top destination for employment and career advancement. Foreigners from all over the world live and work in Thailand. It's common for well-paid expatriates to hire maids, nannies, and helpers, and the cost of living is more or less affordable. Working and living in Thailand is not as simple as it may seem; there's *a lot of* misinformation about working and living in the country on the internet.

Some of the main employment opportunities for foreigners in Thailand are [teaching English](#), teaching in either local or international schools, and working as a dive instructor. However, all of these opportunities are very competitive, and dive masters in particular are often underpaid.

Employment is broadly defined in Thailand. In simple terms, any duty — such as modelling, being a paid volunteer, being an extra in a movie, being a paid intern, or working for a company based in Thailand — that results in monetary compensation *is considered employment* and you are required to obtain a work permit to take up such duties. While working without a work permit was a common practice in the past, the authorities are clamping down on illegal workers and migrants.

Obtaining a work permit as a foreigner can be a bureaucratic hassle; a lot of paperwork — for instance, a copy of your university degree, proof you're working for a company, and so on — is needed to apply for one and you're normally required to earn a high wage to obtain one. Teachers are exempt from the wage requirement. If you plan to work for a company based in Thailand, the company you intend to work for has to be willing to sponsor you. Some unscrupulous employers will skip the process and instead ask you to make regular visa runs to the nearest border. You should *decline* job offers from such employers and report them to the authorities, as you can be denied entry and blacklisted from the country if caught at immigration.

Several occupations are off-limits to foreigners. For example, foreigners may not provide legal services (except arbitration), provide accounting services, work as tour guides, or work in a variety of menial jobs. Civil engineers and architects cannot work in the country unless they can prove to the government that they are licensed.

Foreigners working in Thailand are, by law, required to report to the immigration authorities every **90 days**. Your company can assist with this process, or if you like, you may choose to do this yourself.

Try to acquire some proficiency in Thai. Doing so will open many doors for you, since most Thais cannot converse in English.

There are dozens of diving shops that provide training and internships. Ko Tao (Turtle Island) in particular is a great place to work as a diving instructor.

One way to start working as a teacher is to gain a TESOL/TEFL Certificate. One of the largest TESOL schools in the world is head quartered in the small village of Ban Phe, Rayong. Other provinces in Thailand offer TEFL/TESOL Certification Courses. In Northern Thailand, Chiang Mai University has a comprehensive teacher training program located on its main campus.

The Thai work culture is hierarchical and formal. What this means is that you should always show respect to your superiors. If your superior asks you to do something, do it.

Volunteering

Volunteering is a great way to meet locals and experience the culture and traditions of Thailand. There are many worldwide organizations that offer volunteer work on such projects as community development, conservation, wildlife sanctuary maintenance & development, scientific research, & education programs. Here some organisations you can volunteer at:

- **Child's Dream Foundation** (<http://www.childsdream.org>), 238/3 Wualai Rd, Haiya, Muang, Chiang Mai 50100, ☎ +66 53 201811, info@childsdream.org (<mailto:info@childsdream.org>). Founded by two Swiss financiers with good hearts, Child's Dream places volunteers in schools in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia in addition to other good works. They are highly regarded for their ethics and efficiency. Does not charge volunteers.
- **Foundation for Education and Development** (<http://www.ghre.org>) (*formerly known as Grassroots Human Rights and Development*), Moo 4 Khuk Khak, Takua Pa, Phang Nga 82120 (*at km790 on Hwy 4 in Khuk Khak (Khao Lak)*), ☎ +66 76 486351. A joint Burmese-Thai NGO committed to assisting Burmese migrant workers in Phang Nga Province, just north of Ko Phuket in the region better known as Khao Lak. FED runs schools, health clinics, women's empowerment programs, and provides legal assistance to political and economic refugees. The organisation runs on a shoe-string and depends on the commitment of paid staff and volunteers. Does not charge volunteers.
- **Isara Foundation** (<http://www.isara.org/>), 897/1 Mee Chai Rd, Amphur Muang, Nong Khai 43000, ☎ +66 42 460827. Provides help directly to those who are in need. Isara projects focus on the improvement of education (free Learning Centre, government school volunteer teachers, and scholarships), health and safety (helmet campaign), and the environment (Recycling Centre and trash clean-up campaigns). Do not charge you for volunteering.

Eat

The food alone is really reason enough for a trip to Thailand. Curries, fruit shakes, stir fries, noodles, fresh fish made a zillion ways - and that's just the beginning. Food in Thailand can be as cheap and easy as 25 baht *pad Thai* (ผัดไทย, Thai fried noodles) cooked at a street stall or as expensive and complicated as a USD100 ten-course meal by a royal chef served in one of Bangkok's luxury hotels.

Since most backpackers will be sticking closer to the first than the second, one of the great things about Thailand is that food from stalls and tiny sidewalk restaurants is usually quite safe. Unlike some Asian countries, travellers should worry more about overeating or too much curry spice than about unclean

kitchens and bad food. In fact, street restaurants, where you can see what you'll get and everything is cooked on the spot can be a safe option.

Yelp or Tripadvisor are generally not popular in Thailand, and reviews there are usually posted by tourists, not locals. Instead, **Wongnai** (<https://www.wongnai.com/?locale=en>) is the go-to directory for restaurant reviews among Thais. While the interface is available in English, the downside is that almost all reviews are in Thai.

Etiquette

Thai food is most commonly eaten with **fork and spoon**. Hold the spoon in your right hand and use it to eat, and reserve the fork for piling food onto your spoon. Chopsticks are *only* employed for noodle soups and East Asian-style dishes. Sticky rice, common in the northeastern Isaan region, is eaten with your right hand, but regular jasmine rice is not.

Thai food is meant for **sharing**. Everybody gets their own plate of rice and tiny soup bowl, but all the other dishes are laid out in the centre of the table and you're free to eat what you wish. Though some people believe that taking the last piece from a shared plate is considered slightly unlucky, and you may hear people make wishes for *others* to compensate for their own misfortune. A popular wish is that "may my girlfriend/boyfriend be good-looking!"

Food is also generally brought out a dish at a time as it is prepared. It is not expected of diners to wait until all meals are brought out before they start eating as is polite in Western culture. Instead they should tuck into the nearest dish as it arrives.

Thai cuisine

Main article: Thai cuisine

Thai cuisine is characterized by balance and strong flavours, especially **lime juice**, **lemon grass** and **fresh coriander**, the combination of which gives Thai food its distinctive taste. In addition, Thai food has a deserved reputation for being **spicy**, with hot little torpedo-shaped chillies called *phrik khii nuu* (พริกชี้ฟ้า, lit. "mouse shit chillies") making their way into many a dish. Thais are well aware that these can be more than Westerners can handle and will often ask if you like it hot (เผ็ด *phet*). Answer "yes" at your own risk! Another condiment that features prominently in Thai cuisine is **fish sauce** (น้ำปลา *naam pla*), a pungent and very salty sauce that is used to flavour a wide variety of dishes.



A platter of *miang kham* (leaf wrap) ingredients



Green curry (*kaeng khiao wan*) with chicken, served with *roti*



A classic Isaan meal: *som tam* papaya salad, *larb* meat salad and sticky rice

Thai cuisine can be divided into at least four distinct regional styles: Southern Thai cuisine, Central Thai cuisine, Northern Thai cuisine and Isaan cuisine from the northeast of Thailand. Chinese influences also pervade much of Thai cuisine, with many of the most famous street food stalls in Bangkok and other cities throughout the country being owned and run by ethnic Chinese.

Dietary restrictions

Vegetarians won't have too many problems surviving in Thailand, with one significant exception: **fish sauce** (น้ำปลา *naam plaa*) is to Thai cuisine what soy sauce is to Chinese food, and keeping it out of soups, curries and stir-fries will be a challenge.

Thailand is a Buddhist country and vegetarianism is a fairly well-understood concept, especially among Thai-Chinese (many of whom eat only vegetarian food during several festivals). Look for vegetarian restaurants adorned with the distinctive yellow and red 17 sign. Tofu is a traditional Thai ingredient and they aren't afraid to mix it up in some non-traditional dishes such as omelettes (with or without eggs), submarine sandwiches, and burritos. Since Thai dishes are usually made to order, it's easy to ask for anything on the menu to be made without meat or fish. Bangkok features several fantastic veggie and vegan restaurants, but outside of big cities make sure to check that your idea of "veggie" matches the chef's. As Thai-Chinese cuisine traditionally does not include dairy products, most non-dessert dishes at vegetarian restaurants are essentially **vegan**, but make sure your dish does not contain eggs.

Some key phrases for vegetarians:

- *phom kin je* (m) / *di-chan kin je* (f) ผม(ดิฉัน)กินเจ "I eat only vegetarian food"
- *karunaa mai sai naam plaa* กรุณาไม่ใส่น้ำปลา "Please don't use fish sauce"

Thailand has a significant Muslim minority (around 5%), mostly concentrated in Southern Thailand near the Malaysian border. You can still find **halal** food (อาหารมุสลิม *ahaan Muslim*) throughout the country, especially in larger cities, typically clearly labeled with green crescents and the Arabic word "halal". **Kosher** food is virtually unknown in Thailand; if you keep kosher, contact **Chabad Thailand** (<https://www.jewishthailand.com/>) for assistance well in advance of your trip.

Travelling in Thailand if you have significant **allergies** is challenging. Labeling and awareness in general is very low, and Thai food uses many common allergens like soy, fish sauce, shrimp paste and peanuts.

Restaurant chains

Thailand has a large number of indigenous restaurant chains offering much the same fare as your average street stall, but with the added advantages of air conditioning, printed menus (often in English), clean storefront. All the chains are heavily concentrated in Bangkok, but larger cities and popular tourist spots



The "vegetarian" sign, a stylized version of the characters 17



Halal stall in Chiang Mai

may have an outlet or two.

- **Coca and MK.** Near-ubiquitous chains specializing in what the Thais call *suki*, perhaps better known as "hotpot" or "steamboat". A cauldron boils in the middle of your table, you buy ingredients (10-30 baht a pop) and brew your own soup. The longer you spend, the better it tastes, and the bigger the group you're with, the more fun this is!
- **Fuji** (<http://www.fuji.co.th>). And **Zen** specialize in surprisingly passable Japanese food at very cheap prices (at least compared to Japanese restaurants almost anywhere else). Rice/noodle mains are less than 100 baht, and you can stuff yourself full of sushi for less than 500 baht.
- **Kuaytiew Ruea Siam** (*Signs in Thai; look for the boat-shaped decor and hungry red pig logo*). Dirt-cheap noodles with prices starting at 25 baht. Portions aren't too generous, but at that price you can get two! No concessions to English speakers in menu or taste, so point and choose from the pictures and watch out for the spicier soups.
- **S&P** (<http://www.sandp.co.th>). Outlets are a bakery, a café and a restaurant all rolled into one, but their menu's a lot larger than you'd expect: it has all the Thai mainstays you can think of and then some, and most all of it is good. Portions are generally rather small, with prices mostly in the 50-100 baht range.
- **Yum Saap** (*Signs in Thai; look for the big yellow smiley logo*). Known for their Thai-style salads (*yam*), but they offer all the usual as well. Quite cheap with mains around 50 baht.
- **After You** (<https://www.afteryoudessertcafe.com/en/>). Local dessert cafe chain serving Korean-style shaved ice (*bingsoo*), but with many local Thai flavours to choose from. Very popular among youths in Bangkok.

And yes, you can find the usual McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut, Komalas etc. if you insist. If you do end up at McDonald's, at least try the un-Maclike fried chicken with McSomTam (green papaya salad). For those craving American-style pizza, try the ubiquitous The Pizza Company, which is a less expensive and (arguably) tastier local chain.

Drink

Thailand is infamous for its nightlife, which ranges from acoustic guitar and smoking perfectly legal blunts at a beachside hut to superstar DJs and fancy cocktails at hip nightclubs. The Full Moon Party in Ko Phangan draws backpackers all around the world, every Thai beach resort has its nightlife area, and the offerings in Bangkok run the gamut from smoky jazz clubs to enormous open-air beer gardens where *kuk thung* and *mor lam* country music singers from Isaan croon nightly.

Thailand also has a large **sex industry**, which to tourists is most visible in the flashy go-go bars of Bangkok, Pattaya, and Patong (Phuket), which are very much targeted at visitors. While these are thinly disguised fronts for prostitution, legally a grey area in Thailand with all the risks that entails, it's generally OK to visit them only for drinks and the show.



Go-go bar in Soi Cowboy,
Bangkok



In 2022, **cannabis** was completely legalized and retailers sprouted up overnight: you can even buy weed from vending machines now. There are still restrictions on where you can smoke, and almost all other drugs remain strictly banned, with draconian penalties. See [Drugs](#) for details.

Alcohol

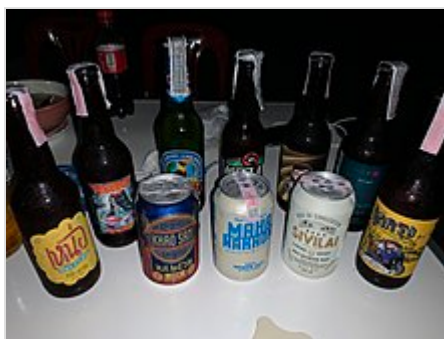
Drinking alcohol in Thailand, especially if you like Western tipples, is actually comparatively expensive, but still very affordable by Western standards.

Retail sales of alcohol in supermarkets and multi-national convenience stores, are limited to between 11:00-14:00 and 17:00-00:00. Restaurants and bars are not affected, and smaller, non-chain stores rarely observe this rule. 7-Eleven is a stickler for following this rule. However, in certain circumstances these rules are relaxed for alcohol purchases above a particular quantity. For example, if you try to purchase 5 litres of wine during the restricted period, it will not be allowed. However, if you were to purchase, say 10 litres of wine, in the same period then this might be permitted. Convenience stores at gas stations are not permitted to sell alcohol at any time.

There are also occasional days throughout the year when alcohol can't be sold anywhere, even the small mom & pop shops normally adhere to the rules on these days, and most bars and pubs do too (although you can probably find a beer somewhere if you're desperate enough). Upmarket hotel bars and restaurants are probably the only places that are realistically likely to be exempt. Religious holidays and elections are normally the reason for these restrictions.

Beer

Western-style beer (เบียร์ *bia*) is a bit of an upmarket drink in Thailand, with the price of a small bottle hovering between 40 and 100 baht in most pubs, bars and restaurants. Thais like their lagers with relatively high alcohol content (around 6%), as it is designed to be drunk with ice, so the beer in Thailand may pack more of a punch than you are used to. However, if you're from Europe or Australia, you will find this normal.



Thai craft beer can only be bought from their breweries

If you ever find yourself wondering why you can't find any smaller local beer brands in Thailand, it isn't because of lack of demand. The government, according to its Liquor Control Act, only licences breweries that produce over ten million litres of beer yearly. Because setting up a brewery of this capacity would cost over 1 billion baht, the only local beers you can buy are brewed by two large Thai companies: ThaiBev (Chang, Archa) and Boon Rawd Brewery (Singha, Leo). Smaller, independent breweries are legally forbidden from selling their beer in shops, bars and restaurants off the brewery premises, which prevents their growth. To get around this, some "Thai" craft beers are brewed overseas and are thus categorised as "foreign" beers, which are allowed to

be sold in shops as normal. While the Thai Finance Ministry argues that such restrictions are necessary to ensure quality control, there is growing pressure (<https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1735823/call-time-on-beer-barons>) in Thailand to remove this restriction on independent breweries.

- **Local brews:** For many years the only locally brewed beer was **Singha** (pronounced just *Sing*) but it has lost market to cheaper and stronger **Chang**. Both are pretty strong (Chang especially, being 6%, and Singha 5%), but for those who prefer something a bit lighter, both local brands have introduced low-alcohol versions of their beers. **Singha Light** comes in at 3.5%, **Chang Draught** is 5% and **Chang Light** is 4.2%. There are also some cheaper local beers - **Leo** (very popular, and 10-20% cheaper than Singha) and **Archa** (the very cheapest, and with its lack of flavour, you won't find it in bars, but is available in almost any 7-Eleven) being among the most popular.



A bottle of Chang in Bangkok

- **Premium brands:** The two most popular premium brands are **Heineken** and **Tiger**, but **San Miguel**, **Federbrau** and other Asian beers such as the Japanese **Asahi** are also fairly commonplace. The premium beers tend to be a bit weaker than the full-strength local beers, and are about 10-20% more expensive.
- **Imported beers:** Most upmarket pubs in touristy areas will have at least a couple of imported beers available along with the usual local brands, either on draught, in bottles or both. Belgian and German beers can often be found, as well as Irish stouts and ales such as **Guinness**, British bitters such as **John Smiths** and the light Mexican beer **Corona** is gaining in popularity. Regional favourite **Beerlao** has also started to make an appearance in bars and pubs around the country. All imported beers (with the exception of Beerlao) are very expensive though, being about twice the price of locally sourced beers, due to alcohol import tariffs.
- **Other non-beers:** The usual range of "alcopops" is available in Thailand, with **Bacardi Breezer** enjoying the lion's share of the market. **Spy** wine cooler (of about 10 varieties) is also popular. **Cider** is harder to find, although some pubs have started to stock **Magners** and **Bulmers**.

Imported drinks

Imported liquors, wines and beers are widely available but prohibitively priced for the average Thai. A shot of any brand-name liquor is at least 100 baht, a pint of Guinness will set you back at least 200 baht and, thanks to an inexplicable 340% tax, even the cheapest bottle of wine will set you back over 500 baht. In cheaper bars (especially the go-go kind), the content of that familiar bottle of Jack Daniels may be something entirely different.

Rice wine

Thai rice wine (สาโท *sato*) is actually a beer brewed from glutinous rice, and thus a spiritual cousin of Japanese *sake*. While traditionally associated with Isaan, it's now sold nationwide under the brand **Siam Sato**, available in any 7-Eleven at 25 baht for a 0.65L bottle. At 8% alcohol, it's cheap and potent, but you may regret it the next morning! The original style of brewing and serving *sato* is in earthenware jars called *hai*, hence the drink's other name *lao hai* (เหล้าไห). These are served by breaking the seal on the jar, adding water, and drinking immediately with either glasses or, traditionally, with a straw directly from the pot.

Whisky/rum

The misnamed **Thai whisky** (*lao*) refers to a number of liquors. The best known are the infamous **Mekhong** (แม่น้ำโขง *Maekhong*) brand and its competitor, the sweeter **Sang Som** (แสงโสม *Saengsom*), which are both brewed primarily from sugarcane and thus actually rum. Indeed, the only resemblances to whisky are the brown color and high alcohol content, and some people liken the smell to nail polish remover, but the taste is not quite as bad, especially when diluted with cola or soda water. This is also by far the cheapest way to get blotto, as a pocket flask of the stuff (available in any convenience store or supermarket) costs only around 50 baht.



Saeng Som rum with soda water (แสงโสม โซดา *saengsom sohda*), a common local drink. Mosquito coil optional.

The "real" Thai whisky is *lao khao* (เหล้าขาว "white liquor"), which is distilled from rice. While commercial versions are available, it's mostly distilled at home as moonshine, in which case it also goes by the name *lao theuan* ("jungle liquor"). White liquor with herbs added for flavor and medical effect is called *ya dong* (ยาตอง). Strictly speaking, both are illegal, but nobody seems to mind very much, especially when hill-tribe-trekking in the North you're likely to be invited to sample some, and it's polite to at least take a sip.

Iced drinks

Coconut water (น้ำมะพร้าว *naam ma-phrao*), iced and drunk directly from a fresh coconut is a cheap and healthy way to cool the body. Available at restaurants and also from fruit juice vendors.

Fruit juices, freezes and milkshakes of all kinds are very popular with Thais and visitors alike. Most cafés and restaurants charge 20-40 baht, but a bottle of freshly squeezed **Thai sweet orange juice** (น้ำส้ม *naam som*) — which really is orange in colour! — can be sold on the street for 15-30 baht. Thais often add salt to their fruit juices, an acquired taste that you might just learn to like. Thais also like to have basil seeds in their iced fruit juice sold on the road. They look like small jelly balls down in the bottle.

Tea and coffee

One of Thailand's most characteristic drinks is **Thai iced tea** (ชาเย็น *chaa yen*, lit. "cold tea"). Instantly identifiable thanks to its lurid orange colour, this is the side effect of adding ground tamarind seed (or these days, artificial colour) during the curing process. The iced tea is always very strong and very sweet, and usually served with a dash of condensed milk and evaporated milk; ask for *chaa dam yen* to skip the milk. A popular variant among locals that is typically sold at markets in the morning is **Thai hot tea** (ชาร้อน *chaa rorn*), often served with Chinese-style *youtiao* (油條) fritters, known in Thai as *pathongko* (ปากทองโก).



Thai iced tea

Naam chaa and *chaa jiin* are weak and full-strength Chinese tea, often served in restaurants for free. Coffee (กาแฟ *kaafae*) is also widely available, and is usually served with condensed milk and lots of sugar. Ask for *kaafae thung* to get traditional filtered "bag" coffee instead of instant.

Starbucks is present in Thailand, but for the moment local competitors **Black Canyon Coffee** and **S&P** still have the edge in market share. These are the places to look for if you want that triple-mocha latte with hazelnut swirl and are willing to pay 100 baht for the privilege.

- **Black Canyon Coffee** (<http://blackcanyoncoffee.com>). Is Thailand's home-brewed Starbucks, but while coffee is their mainstay they also offer a limited meal menu. Try the *chaa yen* (lurid orange Thai iced tea with milk).

Energy drinks

Thailand is the original home of the Red Bull brand energy drink - a licensed and re-branded version of Thailand's original *Krathing Daeng* (กระต๊อแดง, "Red Bull"), complete with the familiar logo of two bulls charging at each other.

The Thai version, however, is syrupy sweet, uncarbonated and comes packaged in medicinal-looking brown glass bottles, as the target customers are not trendy clubbers, but Thailand's working class of construction workers and bus drivers in need of a pick-me-up. And a pick-me-up it most certainly is; the caffeine content is higher even than Western-style Red Bull, and packs a punch equivalent to two or three shots of espresso coffee. Krathing Daeng and its many competitors (including M150, Shark, .357 and the inevitable *Karabao Daeng*, "Red Buffalo") are available in any convenience store for 10 baht a pop, although in some places you can now buy imported Red Bull for five times the price.

Sleep



Note: In 2012 two Quebec sisters died mysteriously while staying at a lodging on Phi Phi Island. In 2009, a Norwegian woman and a US woman in adjacent rooms at a Phi Phi guesthouse died. Four others died about the same time while staying at a Chiang Mai lodging. Why? Suspicions now are that all may have been poisoned by outgassing from aluminum phosphide (ALP) pellets used to kill bedbugs. The use of aluminum phosphide is illegal in Thailand, but it is available on the market. About all you can do to protect yourself is to quiz hotel management about their pesticide use policy. Check the room before committing to a stay. If you see (ALP is a grey-green-yellow powder) or smell anything that hints at the use of pesticides, stay elsewhere.



Note: Persons writing negative online reviews about accommodations have been arrested and jailed. Thai libel laws are very strict, and even truthful comments may be illegal, or at least "presumed" illegal until shown otherwise. Do **not** write any negative reviews until you have left Thailand's borders.

Thailand has accommodation in every price bracket. Always take a look at the room (or better still several rooms, sometimes owners offer the cheaper rooms first) before agreeing a price. In smaller establishments also do ask for the agreed price in writing to avoid problems during check out.

The best prices (30-50% off rack rates) for accommodation can be found during Thailand's low season, which is during May-Aug, which not surprisingly also coincides with the region's monsoon season. The peak season is during Dec-Feb.

The prices listed are average for the country, and vary depending on the region and season. Smaller provincial towns will not have fancy hotels or resorts, while on popular island beaches it may be hard to find something cheaper than 300-400 baht even during the low season.

Another issue for westerners to be conscious of, is the unusual bathroom set up found almost everywhere, except perhaps in the four and five star hotels. In Thailand as in other Asian countries as well, the bathrooms even in many new and well kitted out establishments, tend to have the shower system without any kind of water isolation, be it a curtain or door or whatever, to prevent water splashing all over the place. To most, this is quite irritating as a simple floor water containment and drainage with some shower curtain would make everything much better, but it seems, proprietors don't see the logic, therefore, requiring guests to be very tolerant of the unusual bathroom layouts and trying to become adept.

Homestays are common in rural areas. Typically, what this means is that you will be staying at your host's home, or on the host's property in something less than a commercial lodging. Usually, meals are included.

Guesthouses are usually the cheapest option, basic ones cost 100-200 baht per room per night (100 or less for a dorm bed). This gets you a room with a fan, a squat toilet (often shared), shower (shared or private), and not much else. Better guesthouses, especially in towns with significant amount of foreign guests, have more amenities (European-style toilet, 24 hour hot shower, bigger room or even a balcony, free Wi-Fi, sometimes TV, everyday room service, fridge), with prices, subsequently, in the range of 200-500 baht. This makes them close to Thai hotels. The difference is they're more oriented to a Western clientèle, and as such, often offer various tours (sometimes overpriced), computers, and/or in-room Internet access, or even have a ground floor restaurant.

If you're satisfied with the guesthouse of your choice and plan to stay there for more than several days (especially during the low season or in the places with abundant accommodation options such as Chiang Mai), ask for a discount; this may not be offered everywhere, but if it is, the weekly rate may be 25% less or so, and for monthly rates it's not uncommon to be half as much. Normally, you'll have to pay for the entire period asked, but if something changes and you have to check out early refunds are not customary in Thailand. As such, if an early departure is possible (but unlikely enough to pay a week/month in advance), you should discuss this option with the owner/manager beforehand.



Khao San Road is likely the best place in Bangkok to find budget accommodation

The Iron Rules of Thai Innkeeping

Sometimes it seems as if Thai hoteliers at budget and mid-range establishments are required to follow specific rules for their guest rooms. Some of the more rigidly observed are:

- **Bathroom towel racks/hooks** – If they are offered at all, you can be sure that you will invariably have one fewer than the number of towels you are issued.
- **Lighting** – Innkeepers must pledge to never provide lighting at the bathroom mirror to help shavers or those applying make-up. This extends to bedside lighting as well.
- **Electrical outlets** – These, if present, must be placed in the most illogical locations. Extra credit is earned by the establishment if the outlets lack a grounded, 3-prong socket.

Hostels are not typical in Thailand. The reason is obvious: given the abundance of budget accommodation and that hostels are unfamiliar to Thais and, as such, purely Westerner-oriented, the price for a private room in a guesthouse will be almost the same, or even cheaper, than for a dorm bed in a hostel. You may get a bit more Westernised and hotel-like interiors, but at the cost of privacy. If you do insist on staying in a hostel, you can find some in the big cities by checking the web. Don't expect to find them just by walking by the streets, though.

Thai hotels start around 200 baht and go up to around 800 baht. The upper-end of this range will be air-conditioned, the lower end will not. The primary difference is that with a hotel room, your bathroom should be private, bed linen, and towels will be provided, and there may be a hot shower. The guests are mostly Thais. TVs are available except at the lower end; Internet access, though, is less likely to be present than in guesthouses; and is even less likely to be free or in-room.

Tourist hotels are generally around 1,000 baht and offer the basics for a beach vacation: swimming pool, room service, and TV.

Boutique hotels, 2,000 baht and up, have mushroomed during the past few years, they provide a limited number of rooms (10 or fewer) and more personalized service. While these can be excellent, quality varies widely, so research is essential.

Business and luxury hotels, 4,000 baht and up, offer every modern amenity you can think of. International chains are well represented, yet tend to be largely indistinguishable from hotels anywhere else in the world. Some others, notably Bangkok's **The Oriental**, **The Sukhothai** and **The Peninsula** are among the world's best hotels. The most luxurious **resorts** also fall in this price category, with some of the very best and most private adding a few zeros to the price.



Luxury villa in Ko Samui

Stay safe

The number one cause of death for visitors to Thailand is **motorcycle accidents**, especially on the often narrow, mountainous and twisty roads of Phuket and Samui. Drive defensively, wear a helmet, don't drink and avoid travel at night. Violent crime is in general rare, and the foreigners who get into trouble are typically those that get into drunken fights.

Political unrest

Thailand has a long history of political turbulence, with 12 successful military coups since 1932. Tourists are rarely impacted, much less targeted, although in 2008 one anti-government group took over both of Bangkok's airports for a week, causing immense disruption to tourism and the Thai economy.

Since 2014, Thailand has been ruled by a military junta. The blatantly rigged elections of 2019 led to widespread youth-led protests calling for the restoration of democracy, the ouster of the military-led government, and the abolition of the monarchy, perhaps best symbolized by a raised hand with the three

middle fingers pressed together. Stay clear of any protests, as the authorities have been known to deal with them in a heavy-handed manner. As there is also a strong anti-China sentiment driving the protests, mainland Chinese visitors in particular should be especially careful to avoid the protests.

Lèse-majesté

It's illegal to show **disrespect to royalty** (*lèse-majesté*), a crime with a mandatory punishment of 3 to 15 years' imprisonment. Do not make any negative remarks or any remarks which might be perceived as disrespectful about the King, any members of the Royal Family, or anything related to them (such as their pets or appearance). This will usually land you in prison and your embassy/consulate will be of little help in getting you out. Since the King is on the country's currency, don't burn, tear, or mutilate it, especially in the presence of other Thais. If you drop a coin or bill, do not step on it to stop it — this is very rude, since you are stomping on the picture of the King's head that is printed on the coin. Also, anything related to the stories and movies *The King and I* and *Anna and the King* is illegal to possess in Thailand. Almost all Thais, even those in other countries, feel very strongly when it comes to any version of this story. They feel that it makes a mockery of their age-old monarchy and is entirely inaccurate.



The "Hunger Games" protest gesture

The hand gesture of raised up hand with three middle fingers pressed together (described in the previous section), which is often used as a protest symbol in the 2020 protests, is also deemed disrespectful of the royalty.

Although it's mainly Thais who are prosecuted for *lèse-majesté* (sometimes as a political weapon), a few foreigners *have* been charged and even jailed for it, in some cases for publishing remarks that would not even ruffle feathers in the Western press. Pleading guilty and seeking a royal pardon is generally seen as the quickest path to freedom, and even that would probably not spare you from months of pretrial detention and some time spent in jail.

Corruption

While not as bad as in neighbouring Myanmar, Laos or Cambodia, corruption is unfortunately still fairly common in Thailand. Traffic police in Thailand often request bribes on the order of 200 baht or so from tourists who are stopped for seemingly minor traffic infringements. Immigration officers at the Malaysian border have been known to ask for a bribe of about 20 baht per person before they stamp your passport, though those at airports generally do not ask for bribes.

Scams

Thailand has more than its fair share of scams, but most are easily avoided with some common sense.

More a nuisance than a danger, a common scam by touts, taxi drivers and tuk-tuk drivers in Thailand is to wait by important monuments and temples for Western travellers, telling them that the site is closed for a "Buddhist holiday", "repairs" or a similar reason. The "helpful" driver will then offer to take the traveller to another site, such as a market or store. Travellers who accept these offers will often end up at out-of-the-way markets with outrageous prices - and no way to get back to the centre of town where they came from. Always check at the front gate of the site you're visiting to make sure it's really closed.

Some tuk-tuk drivers might demand much higher price than agreed, or they might take you to a sex show, pretending they didn't understand the address (they get commissions from sex shows). For the same reason, avoid drivers who propose their services without being asked, especially near major tourist attractions. Generally, as a foreigner, it is cheaper to take a metered taxi than a tuk-tuk.



Tuk-tuks in Phuket

Don't buy any sightseeing tours at the airport. If you do, they will phone several times to your hotel to remind you about the tour. During the tour, you will be shortly taken to a small temple, without a guide, and then one shop after another (they get commissions). They might refuse to take you back home until you see all the shops. On your way back, they pressure you to buy more tours.

Easily identified with practice, it is not uncommon in tourist areas to be approached by a clean cut, well dressed man who will often be toting a cellphone. These scammers will start up polite conversation, showing interest in the unsuspecting tourist's background, family, or itinerary. Inevitably, the conversation will drift to the meat of the scam. This may be something as innocuous as over-priced tickets to a kanto meal and show, or as serious as a gambling scam or (particularly in Bangkok) the infamous **gem scam**. Once identified, the wary traveller should have no trouble picking out these scammers from a crowd. The tell-tale well-pressed slacks and button-down shirt, freshly cut hair in a conservative style, and late-model cellphone comprise their uniform. Milling around tourist areas without any clear purpose for doing so, the careful traveller should have no difficulty detecting and avoiding these scammers.

Many visitors will encounter young Thai ladies armed with a clipboard and a smile enquiring as to their nationality, often with an aside along the lines of "please help me to earn 30 baht". The suggestion is that the visitor completes a tourism questionnaire (which includes supplying their hotel name and room number) with the incentive that they just might win a prize - the reality is that everyone gets a call to say that they are a "winner"; however, the prize can only be collected by attending an arduous time-share presentation. The lady with the clipboard doesn't get her 30 baht if you don't attend the presentation; also that only English-speaking nationalities are targeted.

A serious scam involves being accused of shoplifting in the duty-free shops in the Bangkok airport. This may involve accidentally straying across ill-defined boundaries between shops with merchandise in hand, or being given a "free gift". Always get a receipt. Those accused are threatened with long prison sentences, then given the opportunity to pay USD10,000 or more as "bail" to make the problem disappear and to be allowed to leave Thailand. If you end up in this pickle, contact your embassy and use *their* lawyer or translator, not the "helpful" guy hanging around.

Fake monks

Theravada Buddhism is an integral part of Thai culture, and it is customary for Buddhist monks to roam the streets collecting alms in the morning. Unfortunately, the presence of foreign tourists unaware of local Buddhist customs has led to some imposters preying on unsuspecting visitors. Genuine monks only go on alms rounds in the morning, as they are not allowed to eat after noon, and are also not allowed to accept or touch money. Alms bowls are solely for the purpose of collecting food. If you see a "monk" soliciting monetary donations, or with money in his alms bowl, he is fake.

Impersonating a monk is a serious offence in Thailand, so you can report any fake monks you see to the police.

Robbery on overnight buses

Thailand is quite safe for tourists. However, there have been reports about people getting drugged and robbed while traveling on overnight buses. To avoid this, steer away from cheapish and non-government buses, make sure you have all your money stored safely in a money belt or another hard-to-reach place and always check your valuables before getting off. Warning your travel companions about this danger is also advised. If you are robbed, firmly refuse to get off the bus, tell everyone about the situation and immediately call the police. It may not be possible to stay on the bus, as your refusal may prompt the staff to unload your checked luggage onto the street and then continue to drive the bus without your luggage, forcing you to disembark or lose it.

Prostitution

Thailand's age of consent is 15 but a higher minimum age of 18 applies in the case of prostitutes. Thai penalties for sex with minors are harsh, and even if your partner is over the age of consent in Thailand, tourists who have sex with minors may be prosecuted by their home country. As far as ascertaining the age of your partner goes, all adult Thais must carry an identity card, which will state that they were born in 2549 or earlier if they were over the age of 18 on 1 Jan 2024 (in the Thai calendar, 2024 is the year 2567).

Some prostitutes are "freelancers", but most are employed by bars or similar businesses. Bar girls, go-go girls and freelancers are all professionals, who are far more likely to be interested in money you can give them than in any continuing relationship for its own sake. Cases of visitors falling desperately in love and then being milked out of all they are worth abound. Thailand has a high rate of STD infection, including HIV/AIDS, both among the general population and among prostitutes. Condoms can be bought easily in Thailand in all convenience shops and pharmacies but may not be as safe as Western ones.

Some aspects of prostitution in Thailand are illegal (e.g., soliciting, pimping), but enforcement is liberal and brothels are commonplace. It's not illegal to pay for sex due to the "Special Services" exemption in Thai law or to pay a "bar fine".

Vaping

Thailand has extremely harsh laws regarding the use of e-cigarettes. Possession carries a sentence of up to 10 years in prison. Especially in Phuket and Bangkok, you are likely to get arrested if you vape in public.

Drugs

Long infamous for its extremely strict drug laws, Thailand did a drastic U-turn in 2018 when it became the first country in Southeast Asia to legalise medical **cannabis** (กัญชา *ganchaa*), expanding this to legalise recreational use as well. While extracts of cannabis including all edibles are limited to under 0.2% THC, there are no limits on the potency of plant parts like flowers, leaves or stems. Consumption in public is *not* permitted, but is now legal in private homes and any spaces like cafes and bars that choose to allow it. Vaping, importing and exporting all remain illegal.

Kratom (ต้นกระท่อม *ton krathom*), a local plant whose leaves are chewed for their mildly stimulant effects, was also fully legalized in 2021.

Thailand continues to maintain an **extremely hard line on all other drugs**, particularly methamphetamine (ยาบ้า *ya ba*, "crazy medicine"), which is a major social problem. Your foreign passport is not enough to get you out of legal trouble. Possession and trafficking offenses that would merit traffic-ticket misdemeanors in other countries can result in life imprisonment or even death in Thailand. Police frequently raid nightclubs, particularly in Bangkok, with urine tests and full body searches on all patrons. Ko Pha Ngan's notoriously drug-fueled Full Moon Parties also often draw police attention.


Penalties for drug possession in Thailand vary in harshness depending on the following: category of drug, amount of drug, and intent of the possessor. If you do take the risk and get arrested on drug-related charges, you would do well to immediately contact your embassy as a first step. The embassy cannot get you out of jail but can inform your family back home of your arrest, and can often give you a list of lawyers and translators you can contact.

The Thai legal system limits the amount of the defending and the usefulness of a lawyer. For minor offences, the penalty can be something like a 2,000-baht fine and deportation. However, to actually get this sentencing, someone not familiar with the system would need external help, translations, bail posted, etc. Stay clean, so you won't have to worry about penalties.

Civil conflict and terrorism

In 2004, long-simmering resentment in the southern Muslim-majority provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala burst into violence. All are off the beaten tourist trail, although the eastern rail line from Hat Yai to Sungai Kolok (gateway to Malaysia's east coast) passes through the area and has been disrupted several times by attacks. The violence was at its worst between 2004-2015 and is now dying down.



A "cannabis café" in Ko Samui. 

Although restricted, recreational cannabis usage is legal in Thailand. Cafés that sell marijuana are usually found in red-light districts and near nightlife, and often use English-language advertising to attract tourists.

Hat Yai (Thailand's largest city in the South) in Songkhla has also been hit by a series of related bombings; however, the main cross-border rail line connecting Hat Yai and Butterworth (on the west coast) has not been affected, and none of the islands or the west coast beaches have been targeted. There is usually a strong Thai military presence in the major towns and cities to keep things in order, and the vast majority of foreign visitors do not encounter any problems.



Fishing Village in Narathiwat



In 2015, Uyghur Islamist separatists also carried out a terrorist attack in Bangkok the Erawan Shrine, a site popular with Chinese tourists. This is, however, largely regarded as an isolated incident, and the odds of it happening again are regarded as remote.

While Thailand's deep south provinces remain under emergency law, as of 2022 there is no elevated risk to tourists visiting these areas. Military checkpoints still exist and soldiers are still posted in public places and on trains, but they do not bother tourists.

Identification

In accordance with Thai law, everyone is required to carry a form of identification with them at all times.

Make a photocopy of your passport and the page with your visa stamp. A picture of your passport, shot from your phone, will work as well. Always keep your passport or the photocopy with you (the law requires that you carry your actual passport at all times, but in practice a photocopy will usually suffice). Many night clubs insist on a passport (and ONLY a passport) as proof of age. It is not required that you leave your passport with a hotel when you check in.

Motorcycle rental places are likely to ask for your passport as collateral. Leaving another document (drivers license, int. drivers licence, second passport, ID card) might be the better option. Or consider offering a cash deposit instead.

Security

Carrying your own **padlock** is a good idea, as budget rooms sometimes use them instead of (or as well as) normal door locks; carry a spare key someplace safe, like your money belt, otherwise considerable expense as well as inconvenience may result should you lose the original. Also consider some type of cable to lock your bag to something too big to fit through the door or window.

Wildlife

Thailand has a few dangerous animals. The most common menace is **stray dogs**, which frequent even the streets of Bangkok. The vast majority are passive and harmless, but a few of which may carry rabies, so steer clear of them and do not, by any means, feed or pet them. If they try to attack you, don't run, as this will encourage them to chase you as if you were prey. Instead, try to walk away slowly.

Monkeys may be cute and friendly, but in any area where unaware tourists have corrupted them, they expect to get food from humans. They can be very sneaky thieves, and they can bite. As with dogs, you won't want to get bitten, as they carry diseases and viruses. Most urban areas do not have "stray" monkeys, but Lopburi is famous for them.

Venomous **snakes** can be found throughout Thailand, hiding in tall brush or along streams. You're unlikely to ever see one, as they shy away from humans, but they may bite if surprised or provoked. The best course of action when confronted with an unknown snake is to stay still until it leaves. The **Siamese crocodile**, on the other hand, is nearly extinct and found only in a few remote national parks.

Monitor lizards are common in jungles and can sometimes be found in urban areas (Bangkok in particular). Despite their scary looks, they are generally afraid of people and normally try to avoid them. Monitor lizards are protected species, i.e., it is illegal to hunt them, injure them, and keep them as pets. Opinions on monitor lizards vary in Thailand; some people believe that they are auspicious, while many others do not like them, viewing them as dirty, unclean animals. A superstition that some Thai people believe in: if a monitor lizard enters your home, good luck will come your way.

Racism

Thailand is, by and large, a homogeneous country. Large parts of Thailand are not that frequented by foreigners, and interactions between Thais and non-Thais are not that common. People with non-Asian looks are more likely to stand out in areas and places less frequented by foreigners (e.g. public markets, public schools) and may attract curious stares from young children and adults. This *does not* indicate hostility.

You are *unlikely* to encounter or experience racial abuse in any way, shape, or form; Thai people generally consider it shameful to treat foreigners poorly.

While Thailand is known for its hospitality, many Thai people are of the impression that foreigners are not interested in staying in Thailand long-term and integrating into Thai society. People with non-Asian looks may be assumed to be tourists or temporary residents, even if they've stayed here for a long time or are naturalised Thai citizens.

Fights

Fights and brawls are **not uncommon** in areas – bars and entertainment venues in particular – frequented by tourists and foreigners. The majority of fights normally involve alcohol. It is not uncommon for multiple people to get involved in a fight, and weapons are usually involved.

Do not get into public arguments or shouting matches with Thai people, even if they've done something wrong; this can cause a Thai person to lose face and may provoke a violent confrontation. In 2019, an Irish tourist was thrashed by ten people at an entertainment venue after getting into a public argument with a local.

Earthquakes & tsunami

Southern Thailand is seismically active, with earthquakes and tsunamis. The chief culprit is the Indian tectonic plate (carrying the Indian ocean & subcontinent) which, like a skidding truck, is barrelling northwards while spinning anti-clockwise. In this region it collides with the small Burma plate, which carries the Andaman Sea. When the plates grind past each other (a “slip-strike” collision), they cause earthquakes. But the Indian plate is also being subducted – forced beneath the Burma plate – which lifts the sea-bed, displaces the water, and sets off a tsunami. A most violent event occurred on 26 Dec 2004, when along 1000 miles of fault line the sea-bed was suddenly jacked up by several metres. Two hours later, tsunami hit the west coast of Thailand in three waves 20 min apart, and over 8000 people were killed.

There was, and is, no effective local warning system, as (unlike the Pacific) major tsunamis in the Indian Ocean are seen as a once-in-a-century event: “Not since Krakatoa in 1883” is the stock refrain. But memory of the 2004 tragedy remains strong. Expect frantic fleeing from the coast if an earthquake is felt, with gridlock and traffic casualties. Your decision will be whether to rush out of the building before it collapses, or rush indoors to try and get above the third floor.

The Burma plate is in turn being shunted against the Sundah plate, which carries the Peninsula mainland and eastern sea. This movement is less violent, but this fault line lies right under the western coastline, so these earthquakes have more local impact and tsunami could strike immediately. Central and Northern Thailand are less quake-prone but the 2014 Mae Lao earthquake, centred on Chiang Rai, caused one death.

LGBT travellers

Thailand is one of the most tolerant countries in Asia for the LGBT community. Same-sex marriage is legal and LGBT tourism forms a big part of the Thai economy. There is no shortage of gay bars and gay-friendly establishments in the main tourist areas. Transgender cabarets are also a major tourist attraction. Whilst Thailand is one of the world's largest centres of medical tourism for sex reassignment surgery, Thais themselves are not yet able to change their legal gender.

Landmines

Although nowhere near as prevalent as in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, some parts of Thailand, especially near the borders with Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, are contaminated with landmines left behind from the days of the communist insurgency. As you get closer to the borders, be sure not to venture beyond well-established roads and footpaths unless you have a guide who knows the area well.

Stay healthy

Being a tropical country, Thailand has its fair share of exotic tropical diseases. Malaria is generally not a problem in any of the major tourist destinations, but is endemic in rural areas along the borders with Cambodia (including Ko Chang in Trat Province), Laos, and Myanmar. As is the case throughout Southeast Asia, dengue fever can be encountered just about anywhere, including the most modern cities. The only prevention is avoiding mosquito bites. Wear long pants and long sleeves at dusk in mosquito areas and use repellent (available at any corner shop or pharmacy).

Food hygiene levels in Thailand are reasonably high, and it's generally safe to eat at street markets and to drink any water offered to you in restaurants. Using common sense — e.g., avoiding the vendor who leaves raw meat sitting in the sun with flies buzzing around — and following the precautions listed in our article on [travellers' diarrhea](#) is still advisable.

Tap water is usually *not* drinkable in Thailand outside of Bangkok. In many places in Bangkok however, particularly in new buildings, drinking tap water is perfectly safe. However, if you don't want to chance it, buying a bottle of water is the obvious solution. Bottled water (น้ำเปล่า *naam plao*) is cheap and ubiquitous at 5–20 baht a bottle depending on its size and brand, and drinking water served in restaurants is always at least boiled (น้ำต้ม *naam tom*). **Ice** (น้ำแข็ง *naam khaeng*) in Thailand usually comes packaged straight from the factory and is safe; there is only reason to worry if you are served hand-cut ice. You can buy a large package of ice in most 7-Elevens for 7 baht, too. Diarrhoeal diseases, however, are uncommon, and cholera or any severe disease is extremely rare and virtually unknown outside of the Myanmar border.

Mainly in residential areas, machines selling water into your own bottle (1 baht/L, or 50 satang (0.5 baht/L) if paid more than 5 baht) are often available, located in some (Thai mostly) hotels, local shops, or just on the street near one. This is a clean (the water is cleaned and UV-treated on the spot) and extremely cheap option, also, this way you'll avoid making unnecessary plastic waste from empty bottles.

The sun is harsher than at higher latitudes. A couple of hours in the sun with unprotected skin will result in redness and a painful night *even on a cloudy day*.

HIV

Thailand has a high rate of HIV. The estimated adult (15-49) HIV prevalence was 1% of residents in 2021, which is double the global average and more than 10 times the rate in countries like Australia. Other sexually transmitted diseases are common, especially among sex workers. Condoms are sold in all convenience stores, supermarkets, pharmacies, etc. Avoid injection drug use.

Pharmacy

There's a pharmacy on every block in Thailand and most are happy to sell you anything you want without a prescription. However, this is illegal, and police have been known to bust tourists occasionally for possessing medicines without a prescription, even innocuous stuff like asthma medication.

Healthcare

Thailand is a popular destination for medical tourism, and is particularly well-known for sex reassignment surgery. Public hospitals in Bangkok are usually of an acceptable standard and have English-speaking doctors available, though they tend to be understaffed and overcrowded and consequently, waiting times are long. However, the top private hospitals, on the other hand, are among the best in the world, and while vastly more expensive than public hospitals, are still very much affordable by Western standards. Hospitals are staffed by both foreign and Thai doctors, trained either in Europe or the United States.

Access to health services varies across Thailand. The Chiang Mai, Samui and Pattaya regions also have comprehensive emergency, routine and long-term care.

In tourist areas, most doctors speak English. Access to a doctor is usually quick and the prices are reasonable by Western standards. Prices vary and should be checked locally. Please note that there is often a separate charge for each test and procedure, as well as for the medicine. Most doctors specialise in a particular field. It may not be easy to find a general practitioner. The quality of healthcare and availability of English-speaking medical staff can fall sharply once you leave Bangkok and head into the smaller cities and rural areas. In non-tourist areas, only basic health care is available.

Most major cities in Thailand have at least one private hospital that is used by Western expatriates, and while they are more expensive than public hospitals, they provide a higher standard of care with English-speaking doctors and nurses, and are still reasonably priced by Western standards.

Good quality private hospitals include Samitivej Hospital in Bangkok, Bangkok Hospital (member of Bangkok Dusit Medical Services), Phyathai Hospital (several branches in Bangkok), Bumrungrad International Hospital.

In the Pattaya area, good quality health services are available at Bangkok Hospital Pattaya, Pattaya Memorial Hospital, and in Chiang Mai, at least Chiangmai Ram Hospital provides quality care.

In Phuket, international-standard treatment is provided by at least Bangkok Hospital and Phuket Provincial Hospital.

The **Bangkok Hospital** (<https://www.bdms.co.th/>) chain is generally of a high standard, with hospitals throughout the country (in addition to Pattaya and Phuket, for example in Chiang Mai, Hua Hin, Koh Samui and Rayong).

In larger towns and cities, it is common for doctors working in the hospitals to have an after-hours consultation in a small private clinic. In these clinics, you can usually get treatment quickly and easily. Treatment in a small clinic is also often cheaper than in a large private hospital.

If you are travelling to Thailand, you should definitely take out comprehensive travel insurance. Repatriation in case of illness is expensive and difficult to arrange without private travel insurance. Treatment is often not started until a pre-payment is made or until the insurance company has confirmed that it will pay for the treatment. In hospitals, payment is often made in cash. Private and state hospitals usually accept credit cards. Insurance documents (insurance card) should always be carried with you when you travel.

Dental services in Thailand are generally of a good standard. For example, there are many good large dental hospitals and clinics in Bangkok. Dental care is also usually available in the regular hospitals, both private and public. There is usually a queue on the general side. Dental care is also available at very different levels and prices. In Bangkok, high quality dental clinics include BIDH (Bangkok International Dental Hospital) and BIDD (Bangkok International Dental Clinic).

It is worth noting that Thailand is still in the process of developing ambulance services. An emergency call will result in the dispatch of a regional rescue unit, which may operate under the auspices of a voluntary organisation. Larger hospitals, both public and private, sometimes have ambulances where emergency treatment can be started immediately. However, ambulances are rare, especially in Bangkok, due to traffic congestion. Motorists and motorcyclists do not always give way to ambulances, which also delays their arrival.

When an emergency situation meets the criteria set by the National Institute for Emergency Medicine, the service is free of charge. If you are registered with a hospital, you should save the emergency numbers for that hospital.

If you think you may need emergency treatment for an underlying medical condition during your stay in Thailand, it is recommended that you stay in the vicinity of a hospital. This will allow you to receive treatment in good time if necessary.

The standard of pharmacies varies. There is usually a pharmacy attached to hospitals, where you should buy your medicines when you visit your doctor. The range of medicines varies depending on the level of the hospital and the pharmacy. Often there are both expensive originator products and cheaper generic products. Some, especially the originals, can be very expensive in Thailand. Access to medicines is more precarious in remote areas.

Please note that doctors in Thailand may prescribe more medicines to treat an illness than would be prescribed in the West. Even for minor ailments, unnecessary medicines may be prescribed. If you are receiving a large amount of medication or suspect that your condition does not require medical treatment, it is advisable to be critical of your medication. You should also seek the opinion of another doctor if necessary.

If you are bringing medicines into or out of Thailand, you should check the list of banned medicines on the Thai Embassy website, for example. For medicines subject to authorisation, take an English-language prescription with you. It is advisable to check with the Thai health authorities, who may need to ask for prior written permission to import the medicine.

Air quality

The "burning season" across central and northern Thailand occurs every January-April, where farmers burn off the remnants of their crops in the dry season. Dry air and forest fires also contribute to cause significant air pollution, especially in Northern Thailand. If you have respiratory trouble, reconsider travelling in Northern Thailand during these months. N95 masks can help, and air quality around Thailand can be monitored on the Air4Thai website (<http://air4thai.pcd.go.th/webV2/index.php>).

Respect

Thai people in general are friendly and polite people.

General

- As is the case throughout Asia, Thais are indirect communicators and they are tempered by the need to "save face" — much like their neighbours — and will normally avoid saying anything construed as judgemental or critical to people. Among close friends, however, communication is more direct.
- One common misconception about Thai people is that "they are easy to win over". Just because a Thai person is cheerful in a conversation or appears to agree with whatever you're saying *does*

Naming conventions

Thais generally follow Western naming conventions of a given name followed by a family name. However, unlike in most Western countries, Thais never address each other using their last names, and the default form of address in formal situations would be to use a title followed by the first name. The most common title is

not mean they agree with or understand whatever you say. They're most likely doing it to save face. Sometimes you must read behind the lines and ascertain how someone is feeling.

- Although Thai people may not admit it, transparency and openness are valued and appreciated by them.
- Thai people often take words at face value. It's important to be clear, and upfront about what you intend to say, as euphemisms and idiomatic language may be misunderstood or taken out of context. Even saying something as simple as "the world is your oyster" may be interpreted literally rather than figuratively.
- There is a prevalent misunderstanding that Thai people are hesitant to interact with foreigners. This could be attributed to the language barrier; Thai people in general are quite conscious about their English skills and fear that their English proficiency might be evaluated by others. You can quickly bridge the gap by demonstrating some understanding of Thai and Thai customs.
- Friendships between Thais and non-Thais are not that common. If you end up befriending a Thai person, chances are, *you* may be the first foreign friend or acquaintance they have ever had.
- As a foreigner, it is common to be asked questions like "why do you work here", "do you have any plans to go back to your home country", "how long have you lived in Thailand", and variations thereof.
- Approaching strangers or making contact with strangers is uncommon unless there's an emergency (car accident, asking for directions, etc.).
- Do not be surprised or upset if nobody appears to show interest in you immediately; friendships and relationships are seen as serious affairs in Thailand, and the journey from acquaintance to friend is often a long one.
- Thai people, in general, are connected to their **families** and it's common for them to spend vacations with their family members.
- Thais have a near-obsessive fascination with the **lottery**. It's the most popular form of gambling in the country and even foreign nationals are allowed to participate in the lottery. Collecting lottery tickets is a popular hobby among Thai people.
- Thai people have a relaxed view of time. It's completely acceptable and normal to show up 15-30 minutes late to something.
- Thai people tend to believe in a wide range of **superstitions**. Evil spirits play a huge role in Thai culture.
- Thai people generally are not that interested in global and current affairs. This is attributed to two factors: the poor quality of the public educational system and a lack of focus about current affairs in Thai media. Talking about such subjects may confuse rather than intrigue the Thais.

"Khun" (คุณ), which is a generic title used regardless of one's gender or marital status, so as a foreigner, you can just default to "Khun" if you are not sure of what you are doing. As such, the current prime minister of Thailand, Prayut Chan-o-cha would be addressed as *Khun Prayut* in Thai, and "Mr. Prayut" in English.

All Thais also have a nickname (ชื่อเล่น *chue len*), often completely unconnected to their legal name; for example, Prayut's nickname is *Tuu*, and he is widely known as *Lung Tu* (Uncle Tu). Nicknames are near-universally used in social situations between people who know each other, roughly paralleling "being on a first name basis" in the Western world.

What to do

- **Respect for elders** is important, and it is customary to use **honorifics** with people you are unfamiliar with. The most common way of addressing someone you don't know or someone senior to you: use the term *Khun* followed by the person's first name (applicable to both men and women).
- **Show respect to monks.** Monks are highly respected in Thai society, and the importance of showing respect to them cannot be overstated. It is customary for Thai men to spend some time living as a monk at least once in their lifetime. If you cross paths with a monk in public, lower your head a little and greet them with the 'wai' gesture. If you are on public transportation, give up your seat for them. You do not have to be a practising Buddhist to acknowledge a monk; just be polite.
- Ask questions about someone's vocation and education. Thai people do this to ascertain how they should address and interact with you.
- Attempt to learn the local language. Thai people know that Thai is difficult to learn, and they will very much appreciate your efforts to speak it, even if your knowledge of the language is rudimentary. Demonstrating that you can read and write Thai will very easily wow and win over many people.
- Try to experience the local cuisine and learn more about Thai culture. Thai people appreciate the few foreigners attempting to learn more about their culture and way of life. Doing this will allow you to strike up friendships with Thais.
- Share food and snacks with people you're close to. In an office setting, this is common and expected.
- When meeting people, exchange gifts. This is common and expected.

What to not do

- Do not say or do anything that can be misconstrued as irreverence or disrespect towards the Royal Family. For example, this includes stepping on a coin with a portrait of a Thai king, even if you are doing this to stop the coin from rolling away. See the caution regarding the *Les Majeste* laws in the Politics section above.
- **Frankness is not appreciated.** Thai people are remarkably sensitive to strongly worded comments, and making someone lose face or feel unappreciated is a quick ticket to making yourself an enemy.
 - Thailand has strict **libel laws**, and you can find yourself in legal hot water for making strongly worded comments about someone or something online. Under current laws, defamation is punishable by up to 2 years of imprisonment, a fine of 200,000 baht, or both.
- Do not raise your voice, lose your cool, or use swear words in a conversation. Thai people consider these coarse manners.
- **Privacy** is highly valued in Thailand. Do not inquire about someone's salary, family, or standard of living unless you know them well. Do not expect an invitation to someone's home unless they know you well.
- Do not exhibit the crossed-fingers gesture; exhibiting this gesture means that someone is lying to you. Clarifications may help prevent misunderstandings.
- Do not be loud in public; Thai people consider this extremely rude manners.
- Do not rest your feet on a table; this is impolite.
- Do not touch someone's head; the head is considered sacred in Thailand.



Don't exhibit this gesture in Thailand.



- **Do not show disrespect to monks.** They are accorded a great deal of respect in Thai society.
 - If you are a woman, **do not touch a monk.** It is strictly forbidden for a monk to touch a woman, even by accident.
 - If you are a woman, do not pass anything directly to a monk. Put down what you want to give to a monk, and allow him to pick it up, or hand it to a man so he can pass it to the monk for you.
 - Do not sit or stand higher than a monk. Sit below them (if they are on a raised platform) or kneel before them.
 - If you are seated when a monk or nun enters a room, stand up to show respect.
 - Do not cross your legs in front of a monk. Kneel instead.
 - Do not take pictures of a monk or a nun unless they've given you permission.

The wai

The traditional greeting known as the **wai**, where you press your hands together as is in prayer and bow slightly, is derived from the Hindu cultural influence from India, and still widely practised. Among Thais, there are strict rules of hierarchy that dictate how and when the wai should be given. In brief, subordinates salute superiors first. You should not wai service people or street vendors. The higher your hands go, the more respectful you are. You will also often see Thais doing a wai as they walk past temples and spirit houses.

As a foreign visitor, you are not really expected to know how to wai properly, nor to reciprocate when wai'd to; while you're unlikely to cause offense if you do, you may well look slightly strange. If somebody makes a wai to you, a slight bow alone is more than sufficient for ordinary occasions, and for business, most Thais will shake hands with foreigners instead of waiing anyway.



Ronald McDonald showing how a wai is done

Dress

Personal appearance is very important in Thailand as a measure of respect to other people. You will find that dressing appropriately means that you are shown more respect in return. This translates in many ways, even sometimes lowering initial offering prices at markets. While some allowance is made for the differing customs of foreigners, Thais respond more positively to well-dressed Westerners.

While the most touristy parts of Bangkok, Pattaya and Phuket are exceptions, traditionally, Thais are modest and conservative dressers. At a minimum your clothes should be neat, clean, and free from holes or tears. Except at the beach or at sacred sites, normal western dress is acceptable for both



Dress code for Wat Phra Kaew

normal western dress is acceptable for both

men and women, except that you should avoid clothing showing much skin. Long pants are preferable to shorts, and you should always cover your shoulders. If you are a woman, you should not expose your cleavage. Outside of the major temples and royal palaces, men wearing shorts is generally acceptable.

It is **absolutely unacceptable** to walk around topless in public. Foreign men have been arrested for walking around topless, so cover yourself up! Your abs or dad bod might not be the key to winning over the hearts of the ladies on the street.

Taking off your shoes at temples and private homes is mandatory etiquette, and this may even be requested at some shops. Wear shoes that slip on and off easily. Flip-flops, hiking sandals, and clog-type shoes are usually a good pragmatic choice for traveling in Thailand; only in the most top-end establishments are shoes required.

It is best to play it safe with wats and other sacred sites in Thailand: your dress should be unambiguously modest and cover your entire torso and most of your limbs. For men, ankle-length pants are mandatory; on top, t-shirts are acceptable, though a button-front or polo shirt would be best. Many recommend that women wear only full length dresses and skirts; you should make sure that your clothing covers at least your shoulders and your knees; some places may require that you wear ankle-length pants or skirts and long-sleeved tops. Shorts and sleeveless shirts are highly inappropriate at sacred sites, as are short skirts. The rules are even more strict for foreign visitors, so even if you see a local in shorts, it's not OK for everyone.

Topless sunbathing is common by Western women at many tourist beaches. At beaches which have primarily Thai visitors, however, this is not advised.


Religious etiquette

You're unlikely to cause offence by having a discussion about religion; for the most part, Thai people love to talk about it! It's also okay to discuss your religious convictions with someone, so long as you don't make the discussion competitive.


Proselytising, or anything hinting at it, is neither welcomed nor appreciated in Thailand. Similarly, try not to be overly enthusiastic about your religion, as it can make people feel uncomfortable and uneasy. At best, Thai people will either smile at you or laugh it off.

Although the laws are nowhere near as strict as they are in neighbouring Myanmar, try not to show any form of disrespect to Buddhism. For example, do not wear a T-shirt with Buddha or Buddhist imagery on it, and do not get a Buddha tattoo (if you already have one, cover it up as best you can). Furthermore, it is illegal to take a Buddha statue out of the country without a licence from the Fine Arts Department (a government agency).



Remove your shoes before entering homes and most buildings 



Buddhist prayer flags, Wat Arun, Bangkok 

Monks are an integral part of Buddhism in Thailand, and Thai men are generally expected to spend a certain amount of time living as a monk at least once in their lifetime.

Buddhist monks are meant to avoid sexual temptations, and in particular they do not touch women or take things from women's hands. Women should make every effort to make way for monks on the street and give them room, so they do not accidentally make contact with you and then have to undergo a lengthy purification ritual. Women should avoid offering anything to a monk with their hands. Objects or donations (which should not be cash) should be placed in front of a monk so he can pick it up, or place it on a special cloth he carries with him. Monks will sometimes be aided by a layman who will accept things from women merit-makers on their behalf.

Theravada Buddhist monks are also supposed to avoid material temptations and as such, are not allowed to touch money, so offering money to a monk is considered to be a sign of disrespect in most Theravada Buddhist cultures. Therefore, should you wish to donate to a monk, you should only offer food, and put your monetary donation in the appropriate donation box at the temple. Those monks that accept money are fakes.

As in neighbouring countries, the swastika is widely used in Thailand as a Buddhist religious symbol. It pre-dates Nazism by 2,500 years and has no antisemitic connotations.

When entering temple buildings, always take off your shoes before you do so, as entering a temple with footwear is considered to be a major faux pas. As doorway thresholds are considered a sanctuary for spirits, it's important not to step on a raised threshold, but rather to step over it.

When sitting on the floor in a temple, make sure you kneel or cross your legs under you "mermaid-style" so your feet do not point at any person or statue. Do not pose alongside a Buddha statue for a photo and certainly don't clamber on them. (It's OK to take photos of a statue, but everyone should be facing the statue.)

A sizeable Muslim minority (about 5%) is also present, mainly concentrated in the southern provinces, but also with a significant community in Bangkok. Most Thai Muslims are ethnic Malays, though there are also substantial numbers of Muslims who are ethnically Thai, or descended from Indonesian, Cambodian Cham or South Asian immigrants.



Traditional way to kneel



Animal abuse

Elephants may be a large part of Thailand's tourist business, but many people are unaware of the mistreatment they are subjected to. They're usually forced to work long hours, endure all kinds of psychological, verbal, and physical abuse, and denied food and water.

Once a depressingly common sight, you may run into **elephant beggars**. During night hours, mahouts (trainers) with lumbering elephants approach tourists to feed the creatures bananas or take a photo with them for a fee. The elephants are brought to the city to beg in this way because they are out of work and

are mistreated and visibly distressed under the conditions of the city.

If you intend to go on an **elephant ride**, purchase an **elephant painting**, or "use" elephants for other activities, you may want to take their mistreatment into account. There are a few ethical animal tourism operators in Thailand such as Elephant Nature Park in Chiang Mai or the Wildlife Rescue Centre and Elephant Refuge near Bangkok.

Drugged animals such as lizards and birds are sometimes used by touts as photo subjects. These touts are often seen plying the main tourist beaches of Thailand. The tout will take a photo with you and the doped up animal and then demand payment.

Rare and endangered species are often sold at markets for pets, and many other animal products are sold as luxury items. Do not buy rare pets, leather, ivory, talons, dried sea creatures (such as starfish), fur, feathers, teeth, wool, and other products since they are most likely the result of illegal poaching. Buying them contributes to animal endangerment and abuse.

Other

- When answering the phone, it is common for Thais to say *khrab* (male) or *kha* (female). These two words mean "yes". Thai people proficient in English will normally say "yes" when picking up the phone. This should not be construed as rude manners.
- When answering the phone, some Thai people might say *waa*, which literally means "what is it" or "tell me". Again, this may be seen as rude manners in other parts of the world, but Thai people *do not intend* to be rude; this is simply a matter of culture.
- The head is considered the most exalted part of the body, feet the lowliest. Never touch or pat a Thai on the **head**, including children. If you accidentally touch or bump someone's head, apologize immediately or you'll be perceived as very rude. Similarly, do not touch people with your feet, or even point with them. If someone is sitting with outstretched feet, avoid stepping over them, as this is very rude and could even spark a confrontation. Squeeze around them or ask them to move. Even if the person is sleeping, it is best to go around, as others are likely to notice.
- Thais are conservative compared to Westerners. Public displays of affection are rarely seen, even handholding by married couples, and are generally considered to be distasteful, though due to the dependence of the Thai economy on tourism, Thais grudgingly tolerate such displays by foreigners. Don't make out in public. You'll embarrass yourself and inflame Thai sensibilities.
- It is considered impolite and disrespectful to visibly sniff food before eating it, particularly when eating in someone's home (this is true even if the sniffing is done in appreciation).
- Do not audibly blow your nose in public, especially not at the dinner table, but it is perfectly acceptable to pick your nose at any time or place.
- In Thailand, expression of **negative emotion** such as anger or sadness is almost never overt, and it is possible to enjoy a vacation in Thailand without ever seeming to see an argument or an unhappy person. Thai people smile often compared to Western people. A smile does not necessarily express happiness. When Thai people smile in a conversation they give the signal that they are civilized and intend to behave with civility, even or especially in a case of conflict. Do not interpret a smile as a sign of weakness. "Saving face" is a very important aspect of Thai culture and they will try to avoid embarrassment and confrontation.
- In public places (such as large markets) the **national anthem** is played over loudspeakers at 08:00 and 18:00. When this is played, everyone will stop what they are doing and stand still for the duration. You should do the same. The royal anthem (not national anthem) is

played in cinemas before the film, and everyone must stand. It lasts about a minute, then everyone will continue where they left off. In MRT and SkyTrain stations in Bangkok, the escalators will also lurch to a halt to prevent a large human pile-up.

- When giving and receiving **business cards**, always use your right hand with the left hand supporting the right elbow. As the left hand is traditionally reserved for dirty things, handling business cards with the left hand is considered to be very rude.
- As a reaction against smokers littering beaches with cigarette butts, there is a **complete smoking ban in effect since 1 February 2018 on 24 popular beaches** around the country. If caught smoking at one of these beaches, you might be fined up to 100,000 baht and/or be sentenced to up to one year in jail.

Cope

If you're sticking to major cities and tourist areas, don't worry too much about under-packing; you can get hold of any essentials such as swimming costumes and umbrellas.

You will only need a couple of changes of clothes since you can get washing done anywhere cheaply. Sandals for when your hiking shoes are too hot can be bought cheaply in Thailand, although large sizes for women are harder to come by. If female and anything above a size 2 (US), size 6 (UK & IRL), size 36 (rest of EU), busty, or tall, it is often difficult to find clothes that will fit you in any of the Thai shops. If you are male and have a waist more than 38" you will have trouble finding pants. You will largely be limited to backpacker gear (the omnipresent fisherman pants and "Same Same" t-shirts) or Western imports in Bangkok malls, for the same prices as back home or more. While laundry is cheap, it is useful to bring a few changes of clothes, as you may sweat your way through several outfits a day in the Thai weather.



Floating market in Hat Yai

Take enough padlocks for every double zipper to stop wandering hands and lock up your belongings, even in your hotel room. Lock zippers through the lower holes, *not* the upper ones on the pull tabs. Take earplugs for when you're stuck in a noisy room or want to sleep on the bus.

If you have prescription glasses, it is a good idea to bring a spare pair of glasses or contact lenses plus a copy of your prescription.

Into the toiletries bag throw sun screen and insect repellent. Mosquito coils are also a good idea. A small pocket size torch or flashlight will come in handy when the electricity goes out or for investigating caves. Passport photos come in handy for visas.

If you plan to travel long distances by motorbike, purchase a good quality helmet, which you can do in Thailand. Last but not least, pack your stuff in plastic bags to stop them from getting wet, especially when travelling in the rainy season or on boats.

Aside from the above, the following are recommended:




- Prescriptions for any prescription medications being brought through customs
- Travel insurance
- Blood donor/type card
- Details of your next of kin
- A second photo ID other than your passport
- Credit card plus a backup card for a separate account

Electricity

Electrical power in Thailand is 220 V, 50 Hz. There is a mix of plug types in use. Most typical is the standard ungrounded North American two-bladed plug. Caution: appliances from North America, Japan, and Taiwan meant for only 120 V will overheat and be destroyed without a transformer. Most outlets are ungrounded. Connecting your laptop to mains power will in many cases require that you use an adapter for a two-bladed outlet. They are widely available, even in shops like 7-Eleven. See the article [electrical systems](#) for more information.

Electrical safety might be lacking, mostly in more rural areas. RCCB protection devices are available, but not common. This fact, together with often insufficient grounding, might increase the risk of electric shock. The famous "in shower water heater" are an exception, as they all come with an integrated RCCBs. Press the test button, and do not use it if the test fails.

Newspapers

- **Bangkok Post** (<https://www.bangkokpost.com/>). The main English-language newspaper in Thailand. If you cannot get your hands on a physical copy of the newspaper, you can read the newspaper online.  
- **The Nation** (<https://www.nationthailand.com/>). An online-only English-language newspaper in Thailand. 

Connect

Internet

The Thai government actively censors Internet access. 2010 estimates place the number of blocked websites at 110,000 and growing. Roughly 77% are blocked for reasons of lèse-majesté (content that defames, insults, threatens, or is unflattering to the king, including national security and some political issues), and 22% for pornography, which is illegal in Thailand. Some web pages from BBC One, BBC Two, CNN, Yahoo! News, the *Post-Intelligencer* newspaper (Seattle, USA), and *The Age* newspaper (Melbourne, Australia) dealing with Thai political content are blocked. Wikileaks is blocked.

Internet cafés are widespread and most are inexpensive. Prices as low as 15 baht/hour are commonplace, and speed of connection is generally reasonable, but many cafes close at midnight. Higher prices prevail in major package-tourist destinations (60 baht/hour is typical, 120 baht/hour is not unusual). Islands with multiple Internet cafés include [Ko Phi Phi \(Don\)](#), [Ko Lanta \(Yai\)](#), [Ko Samui](#), [Ko Pha Ngan](#), [Ko Tao](#), [Ko Chang \(Trat\)](#), [Ko Samet \(Rayong\)](#), [Ko Si Chang \(Chonburi\)](#), and of course [Phuket](#).

Outside the most competitive tourist areas, free **Wi-Fi** is not as common as in neighbouring countries in many budget hotels and guesthouses ("mansions") and they may charge a small fee for Internet by LAN or Wi-Fi even if you bring your own laptop. Wi-Fi is commonly available in cafes and restaurants serving Westerners. It's sometimes provided by telecoms who charge fees using them, and it usually requires a telecom account to finish the registration process.

Keyloggers are all too often installed on the computers in cheap cafes, so be on your guard if using online banking, stock broking or even PayPal. Using cut and paste to enter part of your password may defeat some of them. Or typing part of the user name and password inside the text input field (for password or username) then clicking outside of it someplace in the browser window and typing some characters and then clicking back into the text input field and continuing to type the other part and doing this several times. Otherwise take your own laptop to the Internet cafe.

If you suddenly and unexpectedly find yourself typing in Thai (or any other script) you've probably accidentally hit whatever key-combination the computer you're using has been configured to use for switching between languages (often Ctrl+spacebar). To change back, use the "Text Services and Input Languages" option (a quick-access menu is usually available via a "TH" icon visible on the task bar. Simply switch it to "EN").

Telephone

Thailand's country code is **+66**. Mobile phones in Thailand have 10 digits, including the leading zero, while land-line telephones have 9 digits, including the leading zero.

Mobile phones are ubiquitous in Thailand, with thorough network coverage, fast speeds and low prices. The main mobile network operators are:

- AIS (<http://www.ais.co.th/en/>)
- DTAC (<http://www.dtac.co.th/en/>): Tourist eSIM available (<https://www.dtac.co.th/en/prepaid/products/tourist-sim.html>) for 300-600 baht
- TrueMove (<http://truemoveh.truecorp.co.th>)
- National Telecom (<https://www.ntplc.co.th>)

Prepaid SIM cards can be bought in any convenience store for as little as 50-200 baht, and you can charge up as you go. You must provide your passport details when buying a SIM card. The passport registration system only works during the day (usually until 9 PM) for most stores, but the counters at Bangkok airport can register your passport and activate service 24/7, and speak English as well. The one drawback is that airport carrier service counters can only sell special "tourist SIMs", which are limited to being reloaded with special tourist plans in the future and may not roam if you are continuing to another country after Thailand. If you'd rather pay "local pricing", you can generally get a non-tourist SIM from convenience stores in the airport terminal if you arrive during the day.

Most phones sold by major carriers are "locked" to the carrier. That means that the phone won't work with a SIM card on another network, unless you get it unlocked. Contact your carrier's customer service department, and tell them you plan to use your phone overseas for instructions on how to unlock your device. Once unlocked, you can use any SIM card in the phone. Alternatively, the wizards at Bangkok's MBK shopping mall can unlock most phones for less than 500 baht. If you need to buy a mobile phone, you can pick those up at MBK as well, as a huge selection of cheap second-hand mobiles can be found on the 4th floor.

Coverage is very good throughout the country, all cities and tourist destinations (including resort islands) are well covered. If you're planning to travel deep in the countryside, AIS generally has the best network, at the expense of slightly pricier calls.

If you plan to visit Thailand (or even Asia in general; see below) at least once a year for short visits, you have a couple of options to save a SIM for later. Long-validity SIMs have largely been phased out, so you will have to put some effort in (or pay) to keep your SIM alive. The new standard across all SIM types and carriers is that each top-up, no matter how small or large, will extend the validity of the SIM by 30 days, with a maximum of 365 days from day of top-up. Sites like Thai Prepaid Card (<https://thaiprepaidcard.com>) or Mobile Top Up (<https://mobiletopup.com/>) can help you keep your Thai SIM active while out of the country.

For short-term visitors, international roaming onto Thailand's GSM networks is possible, subject to agreements between operators. In the other direction, Thai operators offer very good roaming packages in neighboring countries. These may need to be activated in advance either via a mobile app or in person at a company outlet.

Go next

Thailand borders Malaysia, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos. Vietnam is beyond Cambodia and Laos, and southern China, Singapore and Indonesia are also in the overall region. Budget airlines offer flights from Bangkok to destinations as far as in Japan and Australia.

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