



THAILAND

THAILAND - THE COUNTRY

FAST FACTS

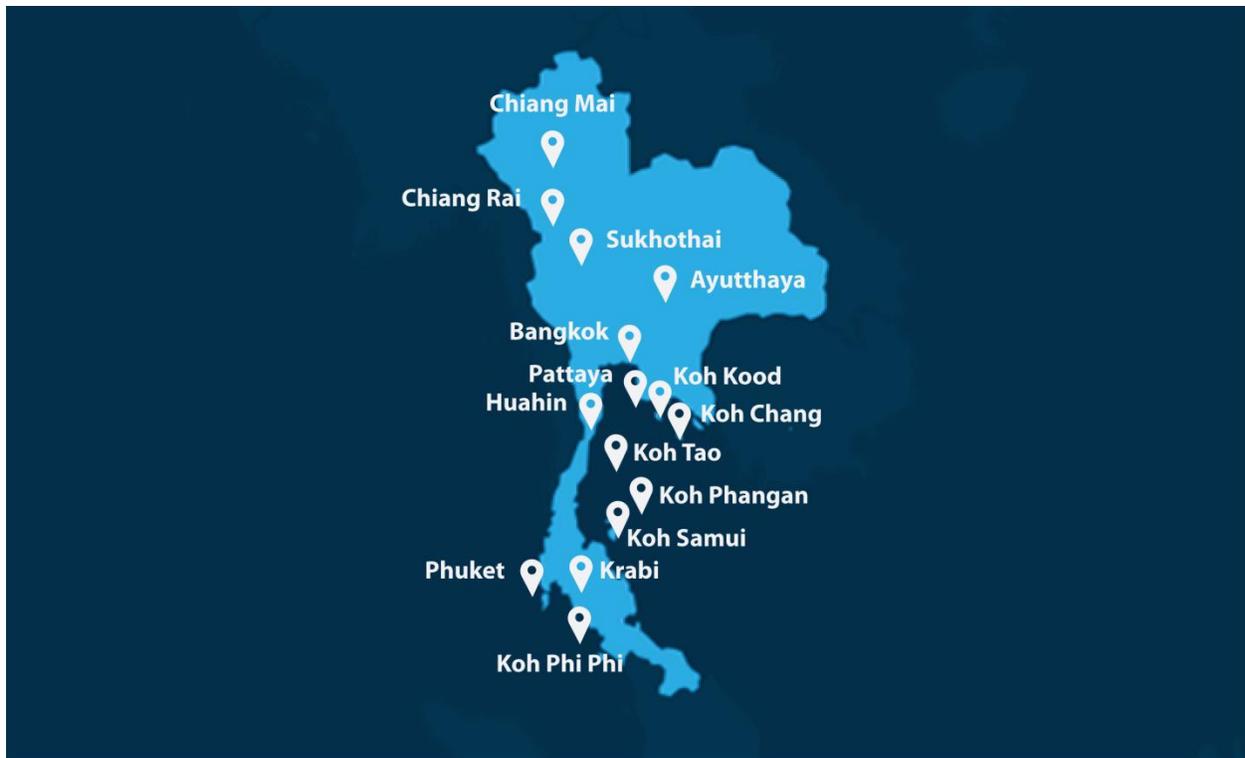


THAILAND THE COUNTRY

The only country in Southeast Asia never colonized, Thailand was known for centuries as Siam until 1939 and again between 1945 and 1949. On May 11, 1949, an official proclamation changed the name of the country to ‘Thailand’ or ‘Prathet Thai’ (in Thai language), by which it has since been known. The word ‘Thai’ means ‘Free’, and therefore ‘Thailand’ means ‘Land of the Free.’

Thailand’s distinctive and unparalleled characteristics stem from Indian and Chinese influences (harmoniously blended by Thai eclecticism), rich ethnic diversity, abundant natural and human resources, and over seven hundred years of cherished independence. Thailand’s traditional culture is delicately tuned to the time-honoured Buddhist’s non-confrontational approach to life, and ideals of charity, tolerance and loving-kindness.

THAILAND HIGHLIGHTS



CHIANG MAI

surrounded by mountains and lush countryside, Chiang Mai is much greener and quieter than the capital, with a cosmopolitan feel. It is a charming city with a laidback atmosphere, submerged in history and culture, and full of charm.

Thailand's "Rose of the North" is a cultural and natural wonderland with ethnic diversity, a multitude of attractions and welcoming hospitality. Chiang Mai literally means "new city" and has retained the name despite celebrating its 700th anniversary in 1996. Chiang Mai is one of the few places in Thailand where it is possible to experience both historical and modern Thai culture coexisting side by side: the city features centuries-old pagodas and temples next to modern convenience stores and boutique hotels. Strangely, for many years tourists had mistaken Chiang Mai simply as the base from which they could plan trekking and rafting trips to hill tribe villages and explore other provinces. Once in Chiang Mai, however, tourists are surprised by the fact that there are so many things to discover other than its beautiful and historic temples. Intriguing diversity among ethnic tribes, a number of elephant camps, many cooking and massage schools, numerous outdoor activities, a variety of handicrafts workshops, various cultural performances, and breathtaking scenery make Chiang Mai one of Asia's most attractive tourist destinations. The phrase "a day in Chiang Mai is enough to see things around town" was once a common expression. Today, two weeks in Chiang Mai may not be long enough for travellers to experience all that Chiang Mai has to offer. Nowadays there are innumerable activities and attractions both in the city and the surrounding province, including massage instruction and golf. Moreover, visitors can visit workshops where they can learn about the production of silk or silver, and purchase memorable, hand-crafted souvenirs. With such a diverse range of attractions

and an equally grand selection of dining and accommodation options, Chiang Mai is a place where both backpackers and luxury tourists can enjoy the ultimate Thailand holiday.

Key Tips:

- Many elephant camps do not engage in Elephant-friendly practices. Avoid patronizing camps that exploit Thailand's elephants.
- Patronizing the Royal Folk Arts and Crafts Training Center in Mae Hong Son benefits both villagers and the authenticity of native arts.
- The admission fee for the Chiang Mai Zoo is not inclusive of the fee to visit the Pandas.
- If you plan on arriving in Chiang Mai during the Songkran festival (April 13-15) make sure you pack everything in plastic prior to placing it in your luggage.

Tourism Authority of Thailand

CHIANG RAI

a small but picturesque city with a relaxed atmosphere and some great places to try the local cuisine. Chiang Rai is an ideal base from which to explore more remote areas of the province. The quieter neighbour of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai is a land of outstanding natural beauty, where visitors looking to avoid the hordes can visit remote hill tribes, spot exotic wildlife, and check out the golden triangle, the former centre of the world's opium trade. Chiang Rai is a traveller's paradise, endowed with abundant natural attractions and antiquities. Attractions range from ruins of ancient settlements and Buddhist shrines to magnificent mountain scenery and hill tribe villages. For those interested in the natural side of Chiang Rai, jungle trekking is a magical experience; explore the mountains of the north along various hiking trails, many of which access the villages of diverse hill tribes groups, many of whom maintain their traditional lifestyles. Chiang Rai town, which tends to be a little more 'laid back' than its more popular neighbour, now competes with Chiang Mai as a tourist attraction and is fast becoming a popular escape for tourists wanting to leave their troubles behind. Chiang Rai, the former capital of the great Lanna Kingdom, is a fascinating province filled with cultural and natural wonders, including the Golden Triangle where Thailand, Laos, and Burma come together; an area that was once the hub of opium production, a trade that had much influence on cultural practices and lifestyles. Chiang Rai had stayed off the tourist radar for many years, its people enjoying very leisurely development and mostly traditional, rural lifestyles. Until this day, entire clans live together in bamboo houses and each village has its own individual character. Recently tourism has boomed in Chiang Rai, where visitors have come to explore the pristine natural beauty of the countryside and immerse themselves in the indigenous culture, including those of a variety of different hill tribe communities. Fortunately for tourists, Chiang Rai is also a centre for community development projects, helping rural villagers develop their attractions without adversely affecting their natural and cultural assets.

Key Tips:

- Get briefed at the Population Development Association's Hill-tribe Education Center prior to organizing or setting out on a trek to visit hill tribe villages.

Tourism Authority of Thailand

SUKHOTHAI

Founded in the 13th century, Sukhothai, which literally means "Dawn of Happiness", was the first truly independent Thai Kingdom and enjoyed a golden age under King Ramkhamhaeng, who is credited with creating the Thai alphabet. The superb temples and monuments of this great city have been lovingly restored, and Sukhothai Historical Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a must-see for all travellers, particularly in the evening when the graceful Buddha images are illuminated by lights

Source of national heritage, the Thai alphabet, the best Loy Krathong celebration, firm foundation of Buddhism, fine Teen Jok cloth, ancient chinaware, holy Pho Khun (Ramkhamhaeng's mother), dawn of happiness. Founded in the 13th century, Sukhothai, which literally means "Dawn of Happiness", was the first truly independent Thai Kingdom and enjoyed a golden age under King Ramkhamhaeng, who is credited with creating the Thai alphabet. The superb temples and monuments of this great city have been lovingly restored, and Sukhothai Historical Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a must-see for all travellers. Sukhothai became an independent kingdom when two princes-Pho Khun Pha Muang and Pho Khun Bang Klang Hao combined their forces and drove the Khmers out of Sukhothai, then a major frontier post of the Angkor Empire. One of Thailand's finest warriors, King Ramkhamhaeng, second son of Pho Khun Bang Klang Haok, made Sukhothai a powerful and extensive kingdom that even established direct political relations with China. Returning from the funeral of Emperor Kublai Khan, King Ramkhamhaeng brought back Chinese artisans who taught the art of pottery to the Thais. While visitors are eager to pick up today's Sangkhalok Pottery, antique examples of such are eagerly sought by collectors. King Ramkhamhaeng also promoted religion and culture, and through his efforts Buddhism flourished among the population. Inspirational faith gave birth to classic forms of Thai religious arts; images of the Lord Buddha sculptured during the Sukhothai Era are cultural treasures that impart a feeling of peace and serenity. A total of eight kings ruled Sukhothai but the gradual decline of Sukhothai occurred during the reigns of the last two kings. The end of this first Thai kingdom occurred in 1365 when it became a vassal state of Ayutthaya, a rising power to the south. Sukhothai, which literally means "Dawn of Happiness", may be the most romantic of all former Thai capital cities.

The superb temples and monuments of this great city have been lovingly restored, and Sukhothai Historical Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a must-see for all travellers, particularly in the evening when the graceful Buddha images are illuminated by lights, while exploring the grassy, tree lined park via bicycle, or most spectacularly, during the Loy Krathong festival, when hundreds of candle-powered, floating lanterns are released into the sky. King Ramkhamhaeng, who reigned over Sukhothai's golden age promoted religion and culture, and brought Chinese artisans back to the city to teach his people the art of pottery. Visitors can visit villages still engaged in the production of Sangkhalok Pottery as well as Hat Siao cloth, named for the village

in Si Satchanalai district, just north of Sukhothai town. This famous hand-woven cloth is produced not far from Si Satchanalai Historical Park, where the ruins of another important historical city can be explored.

Key Tips:

- The Sukhothai Historical Park is open daily from 8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. though there are occasional nights the park is open and illuminated by floodlights.

AYUTTHAYA

just 76km north of Bangkok, the ancient city of Ayutthaya, or Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, the Thai capital for 417 years, is one of Thailand's major tourist attractions. Many ancient ruins and art works can be seen in a city that was founded in 1350 by King U-Thong when the Thais were forced southwards by northern neighbours.

Once considered the most spectacular city on Earth, the ruins of the capital of the Kingdom Ayutthaya are now a major tourist attraction easily accessible from Bangkok by car, train, or boat as either a daytrip or overnight excursion.

Ayutthaya is one of Thailand's historical and majestic highlights. The capital of Thailand, then known as the Kingdom of Ayutthaya, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya was a glorified as one of the biggest cities in Southeast Asia and a regional power for 417 years. The Kingdom of Ayutthaya reached its apex in terms of sovereignty, military might, wealth, culture, and international commerce in the 16th century, when the Kingdom's territory extended into and beyond present-day Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar. Ayutthaya had diplomatic relations with Louis XIV of France and was courted by Dutch, Portuguese, English, Chinese and Japanese merchants. During the 17th century, most foreign visitors to Ayutthaya, traders and diplomats alike, claimed Ayutthaya to be the most illustrious and glittering city that they had ever visited. The map of Ayutthaya published in 1691 by Simon de la Loubere in *Du Royaume De Siam* is proof of such recognition.

Visitors can explore and appreciate Thai history in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, which is only 86 kilometres north of Bangkok. Visitors to Ayutthaya can marvel at its grandeur reflected through numerous magnificent temples and ruins concentrated in and around the city, which is located upon an "island" surrounded by the Chao Phraya, Pa Sak and Lopburi Rivers. Although there are numerous attractions, the Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Historical Park in the heart of Ayutthaya city, is a UNESCO's World Heritage site and a wonder to behold. Once the capital of the Thai Empire, Ayutthaya was a truly impressive city; with three palaces and over 400 temples, located on an island threaded by canals, it attracted traders and diplomats from both Europe and Asia. In 1767, 417 years after it was founded and 15 months after the siege began, the Kingdom of Ayutthaya was conquered and the city's magnificent structures were almost completely destroyed by Burmese invaders. When King Taksin the Great finally liberated the Kingdom, a new dynasty was established and the capital was moved to Thonburi, across the river from modern-day Bangkok. The ruins that now remain, many of which have been painstakingly restored, have been granted World Heritage status by UNESCO.

The architecture of Ayutthaya is a fascinating mix of Khmer and early Sukhothai styles. Some cactus-shaped obelisks, called prangs, denote Khmer influence and look something like the famous towers of Angkor Wat. The more pointed stupas are ascribed to the Sukhothai influence. Ayutthaya is only located about 90 kilometers from Bangkok and can be visited on a daytrip; however, if you appreciate history and religious and historical monuments, an overnight stay will allow for two full days of sightseeing, including a dinner cruise on the Chao Phraya, past the illuminated Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Historical Park, and a visit to only of the city's many other attractions, including the nearby Bang Sai Folk Arts and Craft Center.

Key Tips:

- Visit the Ayutthaya Historical Study Center to learn more about the history of the city.

Tourism Authority of Thailand

BANGKOK

the capital of the country, and by far Thailand's largest city. It is one of Asia's most cosmopolitan cities with magnificent temples and palaces, authentic canals, busy markets and a vibrant nightlife that has something for everyone.

Bangkok contains, from exotic temples to modern shopping malls, which make shopping an integral part of any Bangkok holiday. Nearly every Bangkok holiday includes a visit to Thailand's Grand Palace situated in the heart of Bangkok's Rattanakosin Island, the gleaming spires of the Grand Palace are conveniently located nearby Bangkok's most spectacular temples, including the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Kaeo), the Temple of Dawn (Wat Arun), and Wat Pho, which features an enormous reclining Buddha and was home of the first Thai massage school in the kingdom. These iconic destinations are top attractions to all visitors who travel to Bangkok looking to appreciate Thailand's unique cultural traditions. The winding Chao Phraya is connected by numerous canals from which Bangkok has earned its nickname the "Venice of the East"; when you travel around Bangkok, a cruise on the Chao Phraya, a visit to a floating market, or an exploration of the cities "back alley" canals (khlongs) are themselves unique Bangkok attractions. Other historical and cultural Bangkok sightseeing 'must sees' include the National Museum, Vimanmek Mansion, and Suan Pakkad Palace, all of which either house fine art or are national treasures in their own right. Beyond Bangkok's historical district, there are plenty of other attractions that make a Bangkok holiday both enjoyable and memorable. The downtown districts along Silom and Sukhumvit Roads have a convenient electric rail system, including an elevated sky-train and underground subway, that have made travel in Bangkok both easy and enjoyable. Connecting hotels directly to shopping malls and traditional markets, such as Mah Boon Krong Center and Chatuchak (JJ) weekend market, the MRT and BTS systems have literally elevated Bangkok shopping to world-class status. Of course, no Thailand holiday is complete without experiencing Thailand's vibrant nightlife. Whether, the purpose of your Thailand holiday is to immerse yourself in Thailand's unique culture or simply

to splurge in Bangkok shopping malls, when you travel to Bangkok you are guaranteed a fascinating experience of both old-world charm and modern convenience and luxury.

Key Tips:

- Beware of scams involving tuk tuks, gem shops, and tailors, particularly around popular tourist attractions. Remember, there is no such thing as a free ride.
- Its better to flag down taxis that are already driving (the red light means empty); these will generally use the meter while parked taxis typically ask for higher fixed fares or will take you for the proverbial 'ride'.
- During the monsoon season months of June through September rains come quickly and heavily, particularly in the afternoon. Adequate footwear and an umbrella are advisable.

Tourism Authority of Thailand

PATTAYA

one of Thailand's most popular beach resorts. Now a family-friendly destination, this area has long been well known for its vibrant nightlife and beautiful beaches.

One of the hottest beach-resort destinations in Thailand, Pattaya may not be idyllic but it certainly makes up for it with a wide variety of activities, accommodation and nightlife venues. Pattaya is a popular beach resort on the Gulf of Thailand just 150 km. southeast of Bangkok – a mere two-hour drive. Pattaya's pulsating nightlife is well known, but local authorities have, in recent years, improved the quality of the beaches and reinvented the resort as a more family-friendly destination.

Today, hundreds of thousands of visitors are drawn each year to Pattaya to windsurf, water ski, swim, sunbathe, snorkel, sail, or take trips to nearby islands. Other activities include Bungee jumping, cycling, skydiving, go-Karting, Muay Thai (Thai boxing), and Paintball. Golfers, both novice and expert, are well catered to as well, with a wide selection of golf courses around Pattaya.

Another major draw for visitors to Pattaya is the wide selection of restaurants serving some of Thailand's freshest seafood. Due to the high number of expatriate foreigners in Pattaya there is also an excellent selection of authentic foreign eateries serving French, Italian, Swiss, German, Hungarian, Scandinavian, English, Indian, Arabic, Japanese, and Chinese cuisine.

Drawing such a large number of diverse visitors from across the world, it's no surprise that Pattaya also boasts an incredible choice of accommodation. Those on a tight budget and those with money to spend are equally able to find rooms to suit their needs. Visitors can always find some peaceful beach time at nearby Jomtien beach, just 3 kilometers south. Just over one hour from Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, Pattaya is a lively beach town that draws visitors from around the world. With activities that include a wide array of water sports, golf, shopping, cabaret shows, an elephant village, and fascinating museums, it's impossible not to have an action-packed Pattaya holiday. Unless of course it's relaxation you crave, in which case there are beach chairs and umbrellas lining the Pattaya shore, where wandering vendors will cater to your

every need: from barbequed shrimp to a foot massage. Pattaya is certainly a Thai beach resort that meets the needs of any visitor on any budget.

Key Tips:

- Only fish during the appropriate fishing season.
- Dress politely and take off your shoes before entering Buddhist temples.
- Examine rental motorbikes and cars thoroughly before renting.
- Drive motorbikes and rental cars with extreme caution.
- Beware of con-artists who prey on new tourists to Thailand. While most Thai people are just being friendly, be careful of those offering to do you too many favors or promising you incredible bargains.
- Beware of pick pockets, especially on Walking Street when it's crowded.
- Beware of entertainment venues that have poor signage or are poorly lit inside; some venues offer free admission and then refuse to allow visitors to leave until they have paid exorbitant bar bills.
- Do not purchase or consume illegal drugs or participate in illegal gambling.
- Show respect to the local Thai people and the Thai police. Guilty or not, your display of anger will only make things worse.
- Haggle in a good natured way with small shop vendors. A polite "no thank you" will be more effective than a loud display of emotion.
- Ask for the price first when ordering food and before getting a massage or manicure on the beach. Do likewise before renting a jet ski or getting in a tuk tuk or taxi.
- The sun in Pattaya is very strong; apply sunscreen liberally and frequently.
- Tap water in Thailand is not safe to drink; however, bottled water is cheap and readily available.
- While illegal, the sex industry is a reality in Pattaya. It is strongly advised to protect yourself accordingly, both from sexually transmitted diseases and from theft.

KOH KOOD

Far quieter and less developed than neighboring Koh Chang, Koh Kood is a pristine island ideal for a relaxing beach holiday. Koh Kood is located near the Cambodian border and consequently has an ethnically mixed population. Despite being the fourth largest island in Thailand, Koh Kood has managed to remain an unspoiled slice of tropical heaven

Far quieter and less developed than neighbouring Koh Chang, Koh Kood is a pristine island ideal for a relaxing beach holiday. Just south of Koh Chang, its more popular neighboring island, Koh Kood is far less developed and consequently more idyllic. A rather flat island covered almost entirely with native forest or coconut and rubber plantations, Koh Kood has a number of pristine beaches with crystal clear water. Koh Kood is located near the Cambodian border and consequently has an ethnically mixed population of roughly 2,000 residents that is slowly transitioning from an exclusive plantation and fishing economy to an incipient tourism oriented one.

Development of accommodation on Koh Kood has focused on attracting a middle and upper class Thai clientele that is drawn by the island's beauty and tranquility. Both 4-5 hour slow boats and one hour speedboats from Laem Ngob and Dan Kao Piers in Trat Province provide service to the island though nicer resorts have their own boat service. Despite being the fourth largest island in Thailand, Koh Kood has managed to remain an unspoiled slice of tropical heaven. Located in Trat Province, Koh Kood is the southernmost of the Koh Chang island chain. With gorgeous beaches and little other infrastructure it's a resort destination that caters to those looking for a quiet beach paradise, with soft sand, crystal clear water, and little else. Relaxing is the predominate activity on this island, whose unspoiled nature and leisurely local lifestyle are the prime attractions. Snorkelling or exploring the islands beaches and forests are activities for the more adventurous, although boat trips to nearby islands for sightseeing, snorkelling, and scuba diving are also options. A small fishing village, located at Ao Salat on the Northeast of the island, provides an opportunity to experience island culture.

Key Tips:

- Koh Kood has malaria infected mosquitoes and visitors should bring a supply of mosquito repellent with DEET.
- There are no banks or ATMs on the island, so make sure to bring sufficient funds or use the ATM on the mainland near the pier prior to departure.
- Trat airport is the most convenient airport for access to Koh Kood.
- The best time to travel to Koh Kood is between November and February although the monsoon rains are moderate even during the rainy season months.
- In the low season, between April and November, there is limited boat service to the island as tourist arrivals are less frequent.

HUA HIN

a quiet and relaxing seaside resort ideal for family vacations, a reasonable 2.5 hours drive down from Bangkok. Besides just sunbathing, snorkelling and swimming, visitors can also enjoy golf, spas, caves, peaks, waterfalls, shops, seafood and nearby national parks.

Hua Hin, one of Thailand's premier beach resort towns on the Gulf of Thailand, is less than 200 km south of Bangkok, making it one of the most popular weekend getaway destinations for city residents. A resort equally popular with young couples and families, tourists and Thais, Hua Hin is also the location of the King of Thailand's summer palace, Klai Kang Won, "Far from Worries." Hua Hin features a beautiful, powdery sand beach, numerous seaside seafood restaurants, a lively night market, numerous beach activities, and some great inland activities, not least of which is golfing at some of Thailand's most renowned courses.

Accommodation along the beach and on the streets leading away from the sea range from simple guesthouses to luxury resorts, and includes some of the finest spa-retreats in the world. Hua Hin is accessible via train, bus, or car and the seaside community of 60,000 residents is a fine example of warm and welcoming Thai hospitality. Hua Hin became Thailand's first beach resort

after a train line was laid in the 1920's to provide access from Bangkok and King Rama VII established his summer retreat in the area.

In addition to beach fun and games, outstanding seafood restaurants, and a vibrant night market, Hua Hin is well known for having some of the finest golf courses in Thailand, as well as some of the most renowned resorts and destination spas in the world.

Key Tips:

- The office of the Tourist Police is located at the end of Damnoen Kasem Road at the entrance to the beach.
- The Hua Hin Police Station is located on Damnoen Kasem Road, opposite the CAT offices and Post Office. Their telephone number is 1155.

Tourism Authority of Thailand

KOH CHANG

also known as Elephant Island, Koh Chang is popular with those wanting to dive at the Mu Ko Chang National Marine Park and explore the underwater coral gardens. This tiny island is also popular with tourists looking for a great place to meet other travellers, relax and have fun. With no less than 50 offshore isles, Koh Chang boasts the finest red gems, sweet Rakam fruits, indigenous dogs, the historic Koh Chang Naval engagement, and is the eastern-most province in Thailand. Ko Chang (Elephant Island) is Thailand's second largest island and the primary destination for those visiting Ko Chang Marine National Park, which includes dozens of unspoiled islands. Located in Trat Province, about 300 kilometers east of Bangkok and not far from the Cambodian border, Ko Chang is 70% covered by unspoiled rainforest and the island's permanent residents are only gradually becoming more involved in tourism as development has increased in the past decade. Now serviced by an airport just 15 minutes from the ferry terminal in Trat, Ko Chang is more easily accessible than ever before.

Drawn to Ko Chang's pristine beaches and sparkling water, more well-to-do Thai and international travellers have been discovering Ko Chang and numerous luxury spas and resorts have sprung up to cater to them. Nonetheless, the island is still a dream destination for budget travellers and families, with a wide variety of affordable accommodation options and numerous gorgeous and tranquil beaches surrounded by crystal clear water. In addition to natural beauty, the island is also home to a wide range of wildlife, including native birds, snakes, deer, and even a number of elephants.

As for activities, Ko Chang and the nearby islands that make up the national park are great for snorkelling, diving, camping, and jungle hiking. The majority of tourists stay at Hat Sai Khao, Hat Kai Muk, Hat Ta Nam, and Laem Bang Bao, all of which are linked by a single road running down the west coast. Access to the island is via Bangkok Airways service to Trat or buses that connect to shuttle service to the ferry docks at Laem Ngop near Trat.

Once the quiet refuge of backpackers in the know, Koh Chang (Elephant Island) has grown in popularity as a tourist destination since 2000, when the Thai government hoped to develop the island as the next Phuket. Fortunately, as Koh Chang is nearly as large as Phuket, a decade of development that has seen the construction of an airport in Trat and numerous hotels and restaurants has done little to sully its appeal as an island of spectacular natural beauty. Koh Chang, the largest island in the Koh Chang Marine National Park, is a beach lover and nature enthusiasts dream come true.

While recent development has led to the opening of some nightlife on the island, the primary attractions on the island are the beaches, waterfalls, and neighbouring islands. However, several fishing villages, a number of naval battle sights, and some opportunities for diving and snorkelling make Koh Chang both an interesting and relaxing place to visit.

Key Tips:

- Koh Chang is approximately 30 km long and 14 km wide: a total area of roughly 217 km².
- The Koh Chang National Marine Park covers an area of 650 km², of which 70 % is offshore.

Tourism Authority of Thailand

KOH TAO

beautiful turquoise waters, stunning marine life and magnificent landscapes wait in Koh Tao – a true divers’ paradise. At just 21 square kilometres, Koh Tao is tiny in comparison to neighbouring Koh Samui and Koh Phangan, but is extremely popular with divers, backpackers and adventure tourists for good reason.

Tiny “turtle island” Koh Tao is a top destination for scuba divers though even non divers are easily drawn in by the island’s beauty and its inhabitants charm. The tiny island of Koh Tao (“Turtle Island”), 45 km north of Koh Phangan, is one of the top scuba diving destinations in Thailand, if not the world. In fact, only Cairns, Australia issues more PADI certifications than Koh Tao.

While some globetrotting SCUBA snobs may express disappointment, the shallow, crystal clear waters of Koh Tao feature abundant marine life and considerable coral that are certain to please both beginners and experienced divers, particularly as the island itself is so spectacular and the atmosphere on Koh Tao is so relaxing. What’s more, the island, which is the site of important breeding grounds for Hawksbill and Green turtles, is now a centre for environmentally friendly diving practices, including the reintroduction of hundreds of juvenile turtles to the island’s ecosystem and efforts to preserve and grow coral reefs.

Non-divers can appreciate the beauty of Koh Tao, which seems relatively devoid of inhabitants while the majority of visitors are spending their days underwater, by taking a boat trip around the island to visit Koh Tao’s many gorgeous beaches and bays, hiking to the summit of the island,

studying yoga, or simply relaxing in a hammock and enjoying the view of nearby Koh Nang Yuan, a spectacular attraction in its own right.

Over the past decade Koh Tao has transformed from a sleepy, yet popular place to get a scuba certification to the second most popular place in the world to do so. Once a destination almost exclusively for scuba divers and those looking to get away from it all, Koh Tao is now also a destination for wild 20-somethings to warm up before or unwind after neighbouring Koh Phangan's Full Moon Party. Fortunately, despite its quite small size, most of the beaches around Koh Tao have retained a charming, laid back atmosphere and bungalows ranging from ultra-basic thatch roof to chic and boutique are available for those on any budget to enjoy the beauty of one of Thailand's most spectacular islands.

Key Tips:

- While there are numerous clinics on Koh Tao at Sairee Beach and Mae Haad, the closest hospitals are on Koh Samui and mainland Chumphon.
- Electricity, supplied by generators, is very expensive: switch off the lights, fans, and air conditioning when leaving your room.
- Don't throw paper or other things into the toilets: the pipes are easily clogged and very difficult to clear.
- Exercise extreme caution when driving motorbikes on Koh Tao.
- Avoid drinking the night before scuba diving.
- Wear mosquito repellent with DEET, particularly around dawn and dusk.
- Koh Tao is a fragile ecosystem hosting over 100,000 visitors a year: please **DO NOT LITTER**: even cigarette butts and plastic wrappers from water bottles take a heavy toll over time
- Water is scarce: don't leave it running, especially during showers.
- Don't throw anything at all into the sea!
- While diving or snorkeling, look, don't touch; this includes turtles, coral, and any other marine life!

Tourism Authority of Thailand

KOH PHANGAN

famous for the Full Moon Party which is held on full moon night every month, this world-famous beach party brings thousands of party lovers to the island. Koh Phangan also has tranquil places for visitors to enjoy nature; you can relax under the shade of coconut trees on white sandy beaches and absorb the spirit of nature.

Blessed with some of Thailand's most spectacular beaches and a still unspoiled interior, Koh Phangan is an ideal destination for those looking to party, relax, or engage in wellness programs, such as a yoga or meditation retreat. Koh Phangan is a large island off the east coast of Surat Thani province in the Gulf of Thailand. Koh Phangan is located about 100 km off shore and about 15 km north of Koh Samui.

Most well known for its monthly full moon party, Koh Phangan features some of the most spectacular beaches in Thailand, most of which are still only moderately developed, providing visitors with easy access to either a wild beach party or a relaxing and quiet beach holiday. While Koh Phangan was once the exclusive domain of backpackers who wished to escape the more commercially developed Koh Samui, there are now resorts that cater to all travellers, from honeymooners to families with children. That said, there are still many resorts that embody the hippie spirit of Koh Phangan's "founders" and draw numerous budget backpackers looking to get away from it all, study meditation or yoga, or engage in other holistic, Ayurvedic or health oriented programs.

Located in the Gulf of Thailand a short boat ride from Koh Samui, Koh Phangan (pronounced pun-ngun) is a large, mountainous island covered with coconut trees and surrounded by white sand beaches and aquamarine waters. While each month thousands of young people flock to the world famous Full Moon Party in Haad Rin, where local and international DJs play music on the beach, there are dozens of other beaches in varying stages of development that are alternatively occupied by five-star beach resorts, budget beach bungalows, and a number of yoga, meditation, and health retreats.

Tourism Authority of Thailand

KOH SAMUI

an island of natural beauty and charm where life can be as active and fast paced or laidback and relaxed as you want. Beautiful white sand beaches, clean, clear warm water; lush tropical gardens and gentle ocean breezes await.

Ko Samui is the premier island destination in the Gulf of Thailand. Samui is easily accessible, features beautiful beaches and a variety of activities, and caters to visitors on any budget. Ko Samui, Thailand's second most popular island destination, is located in the Gulf of Thailand roughly 700 km. south of Bangkok and 80 km. from Thailand's southern coast. Samui is the third largest island in Thailand and the largest in an archipelago of more than 80 islands that includes the Ang Thong National Marine Park, a kayaking paradise and day trip from Ko Samui. While Samui is small enough to be circumnavigated in just a couple of hours by motorbike or car, the island features such a variety of beaches and activities that it would be impossible to experience everything in a single visit. However, this was not always the case.

Until the late 20th century, Samui was home to a small community engaged primarily in fishing and harvesting coconuts. There were not even any roads on the island until the early 1970's. However, once foreign visitors discovered this island gem, lush with tropical forest, fringed with palm tree lined stretches of golden sand, and surrounded by pellucid, aquamarine water, development quickly followed. Today the beaches of Chaweng and Lamai are bustling beach towns with fabulous beach resorts, internationally acclaimed restaurants, and world-class nightclubs.

Activities around Ko Samui include cooking courses, yoga instruction, Muay Thai training, scuba diving, and even golf. While there are a few quieter beaches that are ideal for relaxation, particularly those that feature some of the finest 5-star resorts in the world, and some that exude

old world charm, such as Bo Phut, which features converted, old Chinese shop houses, Samui is a lively, exciting place than it was a few decades ago. Ko Samui has developed into its own style of island paradise, retaining much of its natural beauty while offering nearly every imaginable activity or service for the ultimate beach holiday.

Key Tips:

- While affordable and convenient, motorbikes are the cause of numerous accidents and fatalities; always wear a helmet, never drive drunk, and drive defensively at all times.
- Negotiate all taxi and tuk-tuk fares prior to departing for your destination.
- Be careful walking on the beach or swimming at night, particularly if alone.
- Make sure your scuba diving instructor is fully certified.
- Respect Thai values regarding dress: women should not go topless on the beach and men should not walk around shirtless other than at the beach.

Tourism Authority of Thailand

KRABI

a top tourist destination as a result of its plentiful natural attractions including, white sandy beaches, crystal clear water, extensive coral reefs, numerous caves and waterfalls, and over 130 islands, including Koh Lanta and the jewels of the Andaman coast, the six islands of Mu Koh Phi Phi National Park.

Krabi, a province on southern Thailand's Andaman coast, is an almost otherworldly region of labyrinthine archipelagos, where islands seem to erupt vertically out of the sea and secluded beaches are only accessible by colorfully adorned long tail boats. Krabi's myriad of bays and coves have sheltered pirates, merchants, and sea gypsies for thousands of years and archaeological evidence indicates that Krabi was originally inhabited as early as 25,000 – 35,000 years ago!

With attractions including hot springs, a wildlife sanctuary, sea caves, flourishing coral reefs and exotic marine life, limestone cliffs that draw rock climbing enthusiasts from around the world, and national parks that include the island paradises of Koh Phi Phi and Koh Lanta, one could easily spend weeks in Krabi and leave yearning for more. If that wasn't enough, Krabi features some of the most photogenic sunsets in Thailand, often accompanied by spectacular displays of cloud to cloud lightning, that are best enjoyed from a beachside bar or restaurant. Meanwhile, with all the tourists spread out among various beaches and islands, life goes on in Krabi Town, the somewhat sleepy provincial capital. Surprisingly few tourists spend time in the charming riverside town, whose hilly streets feature a number of cozy cafes and inexpensive and authentic Thai cuisine is served at an outdoor, riverside evening market.

“Town” to most visitors is Ao Nang, a seaside strip of guesthouses, hotels, bars, restaurants, and souvenir shops that continues to grow as tourist arrivals increase, now spreading north into Noppharat Thara, whose quiet, shady beach is part of the national park that includes the Phi Phi

Islands. Ao Nang is the major launching point for boat trips to nearby islands and the isolated beaches of Phra Nang Cape, where the famous former hippie enclave of Railey Beach is located. Krabi Province, which lies along the coast of the Andaman sea in Southern Thailand, is a top tourist destination as a result of its plentiful natural attractions including, white sandy beaches, crystal clear water, extensive coral reefs, numerous caves and waterfalls, and over 130 islands, including Koh Lanta and the jewels of the Andaman coast, the six islands of Mu Koh Phi Phi National Park. While not the top destination in and of itself, Krabi Town is a charming provincial capital located along the banks of a river that leads to the nearby Andaman Sea. Consequently, Krabi is an important port city for both local fisherman as well as boats ferrying visitors to the nearby attractions, including Koh Phi Phi, Koh Lanta, and Railey Beach, one of the premier rock climbing destinations in the world.

Key Tips:

- Visitors are advised to make early reservations (up to a year in advance) for accommodation during the peak season from late December to early January because of the popularity of the Krabi and its attractions.
- When traveling by ferry to islands around Krabi, it may be preferable to purchase only a one way ticket so that your trip can be more easily altered and you can more easily arrange your departure.

Tourism Authority of Thailand

PHUKET

Spectacular scenery, stunning tropical sunsets and warm blue sea await you in one of Asia's most popular beach destinations. This fun island provides an unbeatable combination of perfect silky soft white palm-lined beaches, superb hospitality and great value accommodation, not to mention an active nightlife!

What comes into the mind of travellers when we talk about sea, sun and sand? Phuket must definitely be one of the answers. A number of exciting activities can be found on this island. The island's long history has shaped the Phuket of the present with its diverse ethnic groups, culture, architectural influence, and fine cuisine. These attributes have made Phuket a complete tourist destination that offers a lot more beyond its natural heritage of sea, sand, forest, and world-renowned diving sites. Sino-Portuguese architecture casts its spell delighting travellers to the city, while Phuket style of hospitality has never failed to impress visitors from all walks of life.

Getting to Know:

1. Phuket is located approximately 862 kilometres south of Bangkok.
2. There are only two seasons in a year the green season (May to October) and the hot season (November to April).

Key Tips:

- The beaches of the south coast are typically crowded, while the north is far more tranquil.
- All the major beaches (such as Patong beach, Kata beach, Karon beach, Nai Han beach, Mai Khao beach , Nai Yang beach) offer instruction and equipment for diving, snorkling, wind surfing and sailing. Don't forget to notice red flag! before swim.

Tourism Authority of Thailand

KOH PHI PHI

this is Thailand's Shangri La: a hedonistic paradise where tourists cavort in azure seas and snap pictures of long-tails puttering between craggy cliffs. One of the most beautiful of the Thai islands, there are still plenty of places for a party!

One of the most unique and attractive clusters of islands in the world, Koh Phi Phi is an idyllic island retreat that features a number of beaches that feature a variety of accommodation options and many outdoor activities. Koh Phi Phi is the collective name for a small archipelago in Krabi Province just an hour boat ride from Phuket. Known as the 'jewels of the Andaman Sea', there are six islands in Mu Koh Phi Phi-Nopparathara National Park: Phi Phi Don, Phi Phi Ley, Bamboo Island , Yung Island , Bida Nok, and Bida Nai.

Only Phi Phi Don is inhabited; all others are undeveloped and protected by their National Park status and are frequently visited as day trips from Phuket, Krabi, and Phi Phi Don. Phi Phi Ley was featured in the Hollywood blockbuster movie *The Beach*, a story about the ultimate secluded island beach. Maya Bay was a suitable choice as it epitomizes the stunning beauty of these islands: a bay of pellucid aquamarine water surrounded by towering limestone cliffs that harbours an arcing, white sand beach. The waters surrounding the Phi Phi Islands are filled with exotic marine life, including docile leopard sharks, and snorkelling and diving day trips rival lounging on the beach as top activities on Koh Phi Phi.

Koh Phi Phi also features a vibrant nightlife, with Tonsai Beach containing dozens of beach bars and restaurants and lively Tonsai Village consisting of a maze of shops, bars, and restaurants. Smaller beaches around the island are alternatively ideal for honeymooners, families, those on a budget, and those looking for the ultimate luxury resort retreat.

Koh Phi Phi is the collective name for a cluster of six islands included in the Mu Koh Phi Phi-Nopparathara National Park. Only 45 minutes from Phuket, Koh Phi Phi features towering limestone cliffs that shelter white, sandy beaches and spectacular, aquamarine bays filled with exotic marine life. As one of the premier island destinations in Thailand, Koh Phi Phi features both five-star resorts and budget beach bungalows; and both raucous nightlife and secluded isolation, depending on which beach you choose to stay at.

No where in Thailand, perhaps the world, are there so many opportunities for visitors to find exactly the right beach holiday they are looking for within a setting of such spectacular natural beauty. Whether you enjoy scuba diving, snorkelling, or simply relaxing in a hammock, Koh Phi Phi has a beach that will exceed your wildest dreams.

Key Tips:

- The best time to visit Koh Phi Phi is between the months of November and April when the weather is more temperate and the rains are less frequent.
- In the low season visitors can expect discounted room rates. In the peak season (around Christmas and New Years) it is recommended that you book your room in advance.
- If you plan to scuba dive, make sure your scuba diving instructor is fully accredited.
- Don't go to the beach to walk or swim alone at night.
- Don't purchase or consume any illegal drugs.
- Don't go topless on the beach if you are woman and don't walk around shirtless if you are a man unless you are at the beach; please respect Thai values regarding appropriate attire.

Tourism Authority of Thailand

HISTORY & GOVERNMENT

Dating back to the Neolithic civilization situated at the modern-day UNESCO World Heritage Site in Ban Chiang, the history of Thailand is long, proud, and fairly well documented.

HISTORY

Over the early centuries of the Common Era, tribes of Mon, Khmer, and Tai peoples established realms within the borders of modern Thailand; the Mon speaking Buddhist civilization of Dvaravati in the first millennium giving way to the Khmer empire of Angkor by the turn of the second millennium.

However, the history of Thailand as we know it began when the kingdoms of Lan Na (Chiang Rai/Chiang Mai) and Sukhothai, the first truly independent Thai Kingdoms, established highly developed societies in the North and Central regions of Thailand in the 13th and 14th centuries. The Kingdom of Ayutthaya, which was heavily influenced by the Khmer's of Angkor, eventually conquered neighboring Sukhothai and dominated the region for the next several hundred years of Thai history.

Unfortunately, first Chaing Mai and then Ayutthaya were overrun by Burmese invaders, who occupied the Lan Na capital for several centuries and sacked Ayutthaya, forcing the central Thai kingdom to relocate farther south, establishing a new capital in Thon Buri near Bangkok. After the short lived Thon Buri Period (1767-1772), the capital was moved across the Chao Phraya River, and the first of the current line of Kings, Rama I of the Chakri Dynasty, established the modern capital of Bangkok to commence the Ratanakosin Period of Thai history. The adroit diplomatic leadership of Kings Mongkut (Rama IV, 1851-1868) and Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910) were responsible for maintaining a remarkable 700 year Thai history during which the kingdom was never officially colonized by foreign powers; a turbulent 20th century witnessed the transition to a system of constitutional monarchy, currently overseen by Head of State, King Bumibol Adulyadej (1946- present), is King Rama IX of the Chakri Dynasty and a tenuous but functional democracy has existed under the regency of this much beloved king.

TIMELINE

- 13th Century
Establishment of the first truly independent Thai Kingdoms
- 1767 – 1772
Thonburi near Bangkok was Capital
- 1772
First line of the current Kings, Rama 1 of the Chakri Dynasty
- 1851 – 1868
The adroit diplomatic leadership of Kings Mongkut (Rama IV)
- 1868-1910
King Chulalongkorn were responsible for maintaining a remarkable 700 year Thai history during which the kingdom was never officially colonized by foreign powers
- 1946
King Bumibol Adulyadej, King Rama IX of the Chakri Dynasty

GOVERNMENT

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, not dissimilar to England's, whereby an elected Prime Minister is authorized to be the head of government and a hereditary Thai King is head of state. The constitution of Thailand allows for the people of Thailand to democratically elect their leaders in the form of a parliament, with a bicameral legislature consisting of a Senate and House of Representatives, and executive authority in the hands of the Prime Minister. A Judiciary, overseen by the Supreme Court, was designed to act independently of the executive and the legislature.

GEOGRAPHY

Located in the center of Southeast Asia, Thailand is truly at the heart of the region. Looking over a map of Thailand will reveal a country whose borders form the rough shape of an elephant's head:

Located in the center of Southeast Asia, Thailand is truly at the heart of the region. Looking over a map of Thailand will reveal a country whose borders form the rough shape of an elephant's head: the head and ears forming the mostly landlocked northern and eastern provinces and the

trunk extending down the Malaysian peninsula between the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand.

The geography of Thailand features many natural borders with neighboring countries: a mountainous border with Myanmar (Burma) to the north and west; a long stretch of the Mekong River separating Thailand from Laos to the north and east; and the Mekong River and the Dongrak Mountains delineating the border of Cambodia to the east.

Covering an area of approximately 514,000 square kilometers (200,000 sq miles), Thailand is the 50th largest country in the world, most nearly equal in size to Spain. Located just 15 degrees north of the equator, Thailand has a tropical climate and temperatures typically range from 19 to 38 degrees C (66-100 F); monsoon rains fall predominately from May to July and cooler, drier weather occurs around November and December.



<p>Time GMT +7</p>	<p>66.79 MILLION</p> <p>Population</p>	<p>Bangkok Capital</p>		<p>Area 513,115 sq km (198,114 sq miles)</p>
<p>Coordinates 15.35°N, 101.03°E</p>		<p>Population Density</p> <p>135.3 per sq km</p>	<p>Language Thai</p>	
<p>Electricity 200volts, 50Hz</p>				

CULTURE

Thai culture is incredibly warm and welcoming; Thai people are both open to other people's religious and political beliefs and very proud of their own culture.

THAI CULTURE

Thai culture is incredibly warm and welcoming; Thai people are both open to other people's religious and political beliefs and very proud of their own culture. However, while sensitive to the behaviour of others, Thai people follow some cultural practices that can be awkward for some visitors. Typically, Thais will not show overt displeasure at someone violating these Thailand cultural norms. Such behaviour is actually an important aspect of Thai culture: Thais do not get visibly upset at others! That said, it's better to be aware of these aspects of Thai culture and behave accordingly.

THE MONARCHY

In Thai culture, people have a deep, traditional reverence for the royal family, and visitors should be careful to show respect for the King, the Queen and the royal family, as well as any image of royal family members. It is unacceptable to speak ill of the royal family and it is required by both the standards of Thai culture as well as Thai law to stand in honour of the King prior to movie screenings and other public events.

RELIGION

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

Each Buddha image, large or small, ruined or not, is regarded as a sacred object. Never climb onto one to take a photograph nor do anything which might indicate a lack of respect. Buddhist monks are forbidden to touch or be touched by a woman, or to accept anything from the hand of one. If a woman has to give anything to a monk, she should first hand it to a man, who can then present it to the monk or she should place it on the ground or table within reach of a monk. Monks are similarly not allowed to sit next to women on public transportation, so women should be courteous and not occupy an empty seat next to a monk and cause him to stand.

HINTS

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5. Visitors should dress neatly in all religious shrines.
6. Thais don't normally shake hands when they greet one another, but instead press their palms together in a prayer-like gesture called a wai. Generally, a younger person or person of lesser social status wais an elder or more senior person, who then returns the gesture.

SOCIAL NORMS OF THAILAND CULTURE

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

Overt public displays of affection between men and women are frowned upon, much as public displays of anger are.

DOS & DON'TS

1. **Do not raise your voice.** Thais are very sensitive to confrontation and to voice levels. They speak softly, and disagreements are settled amicably in low tones. If something has gone wrong, complain in a normal tone and speak slowly. In the United States and Europe, we raise our voices often and easily get upset. Try to control that inclination while visiting Thailand. Loud complaints will embarrass everyone, and you won't get the results you want.
2. **If you need help, seek out teenagers wearing nice school uniforms.** They tend to speak the most English, and are happy to help you. Even a group of six or eight in the subway (a sight that would be frightening in New York), is fine to approach in Bangkok. Politeness toward adults is still required here. Do not ask police for help. They don't understand English, and will likely just cause more trouble for you. There is a number for tourist emergencies, 1155, which is like our 911, but it's intended for serious emergencies only (not for directions).
3. **Do not hesitate to get health care.** Thailand has some of the best hospitals in the world, including Bumrungrad, Samitivej and BNH. If you feel ill or have suspicions of an ailment setting in, do not wait to go back home for health care. You'll get premium service, especially in Bangkok, Phuket and the other larger cities
4. **Do take a phrase book with Thai script.** An "I speak English" sign on the door of a taxi doesn't always mean that's true. In many cases they are stuck randomly on taxi doors, and have no real bearing on that day's driver. Do not complain when the taxi drivers don't understand English. It is their country, and they have no obligation to

- learn the most confusing language in the world (English). Just do your best to get where you're going, and don't get frustrated. Choose a phrase book with Thai writing, as no Thai can read a "transliteration" that was fabricated for westerners.
5. **Try the street food.** You won't get sick, unless it's from all the travelling. Most street food, i.e. food sold at the quaint stands on the streets, is grilled and sautéed to the hilt. No germs could survive that kind of open-fire grilling. It's delicious to most people, so at least try it.
 6. **Do smile.** Europeans and Americans smile less than anyone. We frown when we're tired or confused. This can be interpreted as anger in the Land of Smiles. Thais smile a lot, and greet each other warmly. You might be confused about directions, and you don't even realize you're frowning. Try to be aware of it, and cast a warm smile more often while in Thailand. If you approach someone for help or directions while frowning, they might be afraid of you. Smile openly with your map in hand, and you'll get plenty of help.
 7. **Respect their religious statues.** Do not let your kids climb all over a spirit house or a Buddha statue. You wouldn't want visitors coming into your neighbourhood and treating your religion like a carnival ride.
 8. **Use the Sky-train, subway and boats.** Do not rely solely on taxis. Bangkok has a plethora of transportation modes, and most are easy to use. While the bus system will be too complex for a tourist, you can easily use the sky-train and subway. There is also a system of boats that cross the city.
 9. **Be Patient.** Sitting in traffic is a commonality in congested Bangkok. Misunderstandings with language are also commonplace. Be patient, and you'll enjoy the trip more

RELIGION

While roughly 95% of the Thai people are practitioners of Theravada Buddhism, the official religion of Thailand, religious tolerance is both customary in Thailand and protected by the constitution.

By its very nature however, Buddhism, which is based on the teachings of the Buddha, "the enlightened one" (nee Siddhartha Gautama), is a compassionate and tolerant religion, the aim of which is the alleviation of suffering. Consequently, Thai people are very respectful of the religious beliefs of others and are very open toward discussing their Buddhist values with visitors. In fact, there are many opportunities in Thailand to visit Buddhist temples to learn about or study Buddhism and perhaps to learn to meditate.



Religion in Thailand pervades many aspects of Thai life and senior monks are highly revered; it is not uncommon to see their images adorning walls of businesses or homes or upon ornaments inside of taxi cabs. In many towns and villages the neighborhood wat (temple) is the heart of social and religious life. Buddhist holidays occur regularly throughout the year (particularly on days with full moons) and many Thai people go to the wat on these and other important days to pay homage to the Buddha and give alms to monks in order to make merit for themselves.

Meditation, one of the primary practices of Buddhism, is a means of self reflection in order to identify the causes of individual desire and ultimately alleviate ones suffering. Visitors can learn the fundamentals of this practice at a number of wats across the kingdom. Some temples, particularly in Chiang Mai, allow visitors to chat with monks in order to gain general knowledge about Buddhism or to study Buddhism more seriously.

While Theravada Buddhism may technically be considered a philosophy rather than a religion (there is no 'God') Thai Buddhism is infused with many spiritual beliefs which are likely the result of lingering animist and Hindu beliefs from centuries earlier. Most Thai homes and places of business feature a 'spirit house' just outside the building, where offerings are made to appease spirits that might otherwise inhabit their homes or workplaces. Furthermore, Buddhist monks are often brought to new homes and businesses to 'bless them', and Thai people frequently light incense and make prayers to both Buddha images and a host of Hindu gods whose shrines are located throughout Bangkok and the countryside.

The next largest religion in Thailand, Islam, is practiced by only about 4% of the population; the majority of Thai Muslims live in the most southerly provinces near the Malaysian border. Other religions in Thailand include Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Christianity, which are

generally practiced by those living in Bangkok, where a multi-cultural population includes citizens of Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and European descent.

CLIMATE

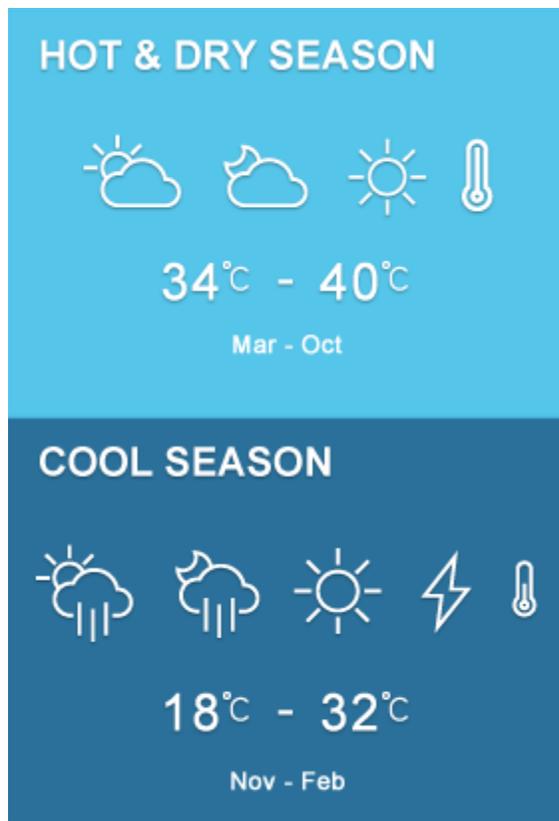
Thailand can best be described as tropical and humid for the majority of the country during most of the year. The area of Thailand north of Bangkok has a climate determined by three seasons whilst the southern peninsular region of Thailand has only two.

Generally speaking, the best time to visit Thailand is from November to February when the northeast monsoon is blowing cool, dry air which serves as a respite from the heat. During this cool season, the temperature ranges from 18°C to 32°C in Bangkok, while in northern and northeast Thailand, temperatures can get quite cool with morning temperatures as low as 8° C to 12° C with the occasional 20° C day. Nights can be particularly chilly and at high altitudes the temperatures can and do drop below freezing.

The summer period, or hot and dry season, is from March to June. At this time temperatures in Bangkok average around 34° C, but can often reach 40° C with the humidity levels of 75%.

Try and avoid April, unless you plan to be permanently submerged in the ocean, because this is the hottest month across the country.

The monsoons finish when the wind direction changes, bringing dry weather from the northeast. At best this season can be described as unpredictable and not the constant downpour of rain like you would expect. The middle months of this season may hold particularly heavy rains for the north of the country.



PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Useful, practical information regarding money, credit cards, ATMs, health & safety, food & drink, transportation, communication, and much more...

MONEY

The currency of Thailand is the Thai Baht. Baht come in both coin and banknote form.

Thai bank hours are generally Monday through Friday, 9:30 am to 3:30 pm, though certain banks have shorter Saturday hours and currency exchange booths are open considerably longer hours in Bangkok and other tourist destinations.

For up-to-date exchange rates, please visit e.g. www.oanda.com



HEALTH & SAFETY

Health Care

Some people may worry about their health in Thailand or about Thailand safety, but Thailand is a very safe country, generally free of crime and most dangerous diseases. Regardless, travellers should take standard precautions. Avoid walking alone at night in remote areas and keep tabs on your valuables (such as your wallet or camera) when in crowded public areas. Some diseases that travellers may be exposed to, such as Dengue Fever, are mosquito borne and should be protected against with quality mosquito repellent. Minor stomach illnesses can be avoided by drinking bottled water and by eating made-to-order foods. Fortunately, if you need to go to a Thailand hospital, there are many hospitals with world class services around the kingdom, particularly in Bangkok. Furthermore, there are police stations and tourist police booths located in and around all major tourist areas and police are typically very helpful to foreigners.

Recommended Vaccinations

1. The following vaccinations are those recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) for travellers to Thailand:
2. Adult Diphtheria, Tetanus & Pertussis Single booster recommended if none in the previous 10 years. Side effects include sore arm and fever.

3. Hepatitis A Provides almost 100% protection for up to a year, a booster after six to 12 months likely provides lifetime protection. Mild side effects such as headache and sore arm occur in 5% to 10% of people.
4. Hepatitis B Now considered routine for most travellers. Given as three shots over six months. A rapid schedule is available, as is a combined vaccination with Hepatitis A. Side effects are mild and uncommon, usually headache and sore arm. Lifetime protection occurs in 95% of people.
5. Measles, Mumps & Rubella Two doses of MMR required unless you have had the diseases. Occasionally a rash and flu-like illness can develop a week after receiving the vaccine. Many young adults require a booster.
6. Polio There have been no cases for many years in Thailand so no booster required. Note that only one booster is required as an adult for lifetime protection.
7. Typhoid Recommended unless your trip is less than a week and only to the major cities. The vaccine offers around 70% protection, lasts for two to three years and comes as a single shot. Tablets are also available, however the injection is usually recommended as it has fewer side effects. Sore arm and fever may occur.
8. Varicella If you haven't had chickenpox, discuss this vaccination with your doctor.
9. The following immunisations are recommended for long-term travellers (more than one month) or those at special risk
10. Influenza Particularly recommended for travellers over 55 years of age or with underlying medical conditions such as diabetes or heart disease. Influenza is however common in all ages and the vaccine should be considered by all travellers.
11. Japanese B Encephalitis Three injections in all. Booster recommended after three years. Sore arm and headache are the most common side effects. Rarely, an allergic reaction comprising hives and swelling can occur up to 10 days after any of the three doses.
12. Rabies Three injections in all. No booster required for travellers. Those at continued risk (animal workers etc) should discuss booster recommendations with their doctor. Side effects are rare – occasionally headache and sore arm.
13. Tuberculosis A complex issue. Adult long-term travellers or expats are usually recommended to have a TB skin test or Quantiferon blood test before and after travel, rather than vaccination. For expatriate children under five, BCG vaccination is highly recommended. Only one vaccine given in a lifetime.

Required vaccinations

1. The only vaccine required by international regulations is yellow fever. Proof of vaccination will only be required if you have visited a country in the yellow-fever zone within the six days prior to entering Thailand. If you are travelling to Thailand from Africa or South America you should check to see if you require proof of vaccination.

TRANSPORTATION

Thailand travel is convenient for visitors as there are many ways to get to Thailand and even more ways to travel in Thailand, whether your destination is Bangkok, Phuket, Chiang Mai, or the most remote provinces.

For both visitors and Thais, travel in Thailand is very convenient, the Thailand transportation infrastructure is modern and well-organized, and exploring the country is a very straightforward experience. Whether your Thailand travel preference is air, rail, bus, road, or water, most modes of Thailand transportation are used to catering to foreign visitors and have frequent departures.

Consequently it's easy to move about the country or explore sights around particular destinations. The inland cities and coastal resorts are well connected to each other, so when you travel in Thailand you can spend a few days in Bangkok, a few more at the beach, and still visit Chiang Mai or Ayutthaya alternatively travelling via bus, boat, train, or plane to get from A to B to C.

Bookings and reservations for travel in Thailand should be done in advance as even in the "low season" many Thai people holiday in their own country and transportation is often booked well in advance. Nonetheless, when you travel in Thailand, there are always options for travellers, even at the last minute, particularly as departures of busses, planes, and trains are very frequent. When you travel in Thailand you can select from many domestic air carriers that service a majority of Thailand's large provincial cities, local trains that connect Bangkok to all regions of the country, and long distance coaches that connect all major cities.



COMMUNICATION

Telephones

Thailand has area codes for the different provinces for land-line. Bangkok is 02 and the provinces will have 0XX. It is now necessary to dial your own area code. Bangkok has 7 digit numbers. Many provinces have 6 digit numbers.

If you see a number written xxx xxx1-5 or xxx xx1-5, that means no rotary system is available at that location so they have 5 lines. A different final digit from 1 to 5 will connect to a different line . . . if that one isn't busy as well.

Mobile numbers are 7 digits and will be prefixed with 01, 06 or 09. Some land-line telephones, especially standard telephone booths, will not allow calls to cell phones. Public telephones that will access mobile phones as well as international numbers are available in most cities. Calling cards are widely available.

Internet

Internet access is widely available in tourist areas like Bangkok and Phuket, which have many internet cafes and Wi-Fi hot-spots. Internet access is less frequent in rural and remote areas.

If Internet connections at hotels are vital for you during your visit to Cambodia, please advise your Focus Asia travel consultant.

Mail

The Thai postal system is very reliable, efficient and economical.

A common service used is EMS or Express Mail Service, which requires a signature by the recipient. The EMS service is offered both domestically and internationally.

For sending packages overseas, you can do the packing at the post office, as they have a packing counter where you can buy packing materials at a very economical rate, and sometimes get assistance. If you are shipping anything in a box, then the standard procedure is to tie a string around the box so that it can be opened and peeked into by customs to verify that what's on the customs slip is what's in the box. If you seal it, then you pay a much higher rate.

There are post offices conveniently located all over the city, and are listed on some of the maps in the map section.

The post offices are open from 8am to 4:30pm, though some don't like to take international parcel shipments after 3:30.

FOOD & DRINK

HINTS

1. Thailand features not only one of the finest cuisines in the world but also a wide selection of restaurants serving authentic Italian, Japanese, Middle Eastern, and other global cuisines.
2. Thai food has a reputation for being spicy
3. Use of fresh herbs and spices as well as the inclusion of fermented fish sauce in nearly every dish –a potential problem for vegetarians, though saying “jay” to indicate you are vegetarian goes a long way.
4. Eating is a Thailand nightlife attraction in its own right!
5. Be adventurous and try some exotic dishes

While Thai food has a reputation for being spicy, Thai food is actually based on a balance between different flavours including spicy, sour, sweet, salty, and bitter. This goes beyond simply combining the flavours within an individual dish to incorporate the contrast in flavours between two or three different dishes, which is one reason Thai’s share meals and eat family style.

One distinctive aspect of Thai food is the use of fresh herbs and spices as well as the inclusion of fermented fish sauce in nearly every dish –a potential problem for vegetarians, though saying “jay” to indicate you are vegetarian goes a long way.

However, there are certainly regional variations in what is typically considered Thai food, these are due to the influences of neighbouring countries, such as China, Laos, Burma, and Malaysia. While some Thai restaurants specialize in specific dishes, most have a huge menu of Thai and western fare and prepare Thai food from throughout the kingdom.

Thai people eat Thai food for more than mere sustenance, enjoyably snacking throughout the day and well into the hours of the morning. Thai restaurants, street stalls, and bars are more than eateries, they are places for people to get together and enjoy each other’s company as well as dine on some incredibly tasty Thai food. **Eating is a Thailand nightlife attraction in its own right!**

Most menus in Thai restaurants read like phone books: filled with pages upon pages of different dishes. **Be adventurous and try some exotic dishes;** if you are eating with a group, you should order Thai family style so that everyone can order something and all can try to find something that you enjoy.

In addition to restaurants however, **Thai people frequently eat food at food stalls along the street or at outdoor markets.** Furthermore, many parts of Thailand feature numerous foreign eateries that serve European, Middle Eastern, and other Asian cuisines.

EVENTS

JANUARY

Bo Sang Umbrella Fair & San Kamphaeng Handicrafts Festival, Bo Sang, near Chiang Mai has become renowned for its exquisitely painted paper umbrellas, which are sought after by visitors from all over the world. An annual fair, held on the main street, celebrates the traditional art of umbrella making and painting, as well as features contests, exhibitions, sales of handicrafts, and a Miss Bo Sang beauty pageant.

FEBRUARY

Flower Festival Chiang Mai, The North is noted for its abundance of flowering plants, especially temperate zone species, which burst into full bloom towards the end of the cool season. Spectacular beautiful florals are the memorable feature of this three-day festival in Chiang Mai also known as the “Rose of the North.” There are floral displays, local handicrafts sales, and enchanting beauty pageants.

Lampang’s Annual Elephant Satok Fair, Thai Elephants Conservation Centre, Lampang Every year, an Elephant Fair is conducted and the Centre organizes a khantoke, a northern style meal, as part of the festivities. The fair also features a spectacular northern style procession as well as typical northern cultural shows and music.

MARCH

ASEAN Barred Ground Dove Festival. Yala Dove-lovers from all over Thailand, as well as from other neighbouring countries come to this southern city for this event. The major highlight is a dove-cooing competition involving more than 1,400 participants.

APRIL

Songkran Festival, Nationwide, The traditional Thai New year is an occasion for celebration throughout the country. This occasion is marked with religious ceremonies as well as public festivities. Water throwing among the people in a spirit of fun and goodwill is the main activity of this festival.

Pattaya Festival, Pattaya, This seaside city enjoys the summer by holding an annual festival. Food and floral floats, beauty pageants, stalls selling delicious cuisine, and a spectacular display of fireworks on the beach are some of the activities that attract those who want to participate in the fun.

Poi sang Long, Mae Hong Son, One of Thailand’s most naturally scenic areas, this province is home to a number of hill tribe groups. Poi Sang Long, the ordination of novices, is a religious ceremony of the Thai Yai. A spectacular colourful procession displaying the offerings for monks is paraded through the town.

MAY

Fruit Fairs, Rayong, Chanthaburi, Trat, The eastern provinces of Rayong, Chanthaburi and Trat are known for their abundance of tropical fruits. When the fruits are at the peak of luscious

ripeness, a fair is held in which the locals sell fruits from the surrounding orchards together with other local products. Spectacular colourful floats decorated with fruit and flowers are paraded through the streets of these provincial capitals.

Royal Ploughing Ceremony, Bangkok, This is an ancient Brahman ritual, conducted at Sanam Luang, which farmers believe is able to forecast the abundance of the next rice crop. The event is a result of a series of ceremonies that are conducted by Phraya Raek Na, portrayed by a high-ranking official from the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperative who wears colourful traditional costumes.

Yasothon Bun Bangfai Rocket Festival, Yasothon . Traditionally, northeastern villages have created and launched rockets of all kinds and sizes as a belief that this will ensure that the gods will send plenty of rain for the rice-planting season. As part of this two-day festival, there are beauty pageants and various forms of folk and cultural entertainment full of merriment.

JUNE

Phi Ta Khon Festival, Loei, With origins from a well-known Buddhist tale, the colourful and vibrant Phi Ta Khon procession feature young men who dress up as spirits to accompany a scared Buddha image and taunt villagers. Included are competitions of masked dances and processions. Everyone is welcome to participate.

JULY

Candle Festival, Ubon Ratchathani, Khao Phansa, or the Buddhist Lent, is the time when all Buddhist monks must stay in their temples. In Ubon Ratchathani, a unique festival that highlights the talented skills of local artisans as well as display of religious devotion is held each year. Elaborately carved beeswax candles of various sizes and shapes are exhibited in high-spirited processions around the city before being presentation to local temples.

AUGUST

Her Majesty The Queen's Birthday Celebration August 12, To display their loyalty and to honour Her Majesty Queen Sirikit on the occasion of her royal birthday, the Thai people decorate their houses and public buildings. Around Bangkok, Ratchadamnoen Avenue, the area around the Grand Palace and other well-known locations are bedecked with coloured lights and magnificent adornments.

SEPTEMBER

Boat Races, Phichit, Phisanulok, Narathiwat, Boat racing has been a part of Thai culture for centuries and regattas are held in various parts of the country. This annual event takes place on the various rivers throughout Thailand. The events feature boats competing against each other with great excitement and cheering from the spectators.

OCTOBER

Wax Cast & Boat Racing Festival, Sakon Nakhon, To celebrate the end of Buddhist Lent (Phansa), people in the northeast (I-san) mould beeswax into miniature Buddhist temple and shrines (wax castles) in order to gain merit, which will determine their future rebirth. These crafted models can be witnessed especially in Sakon Nakhon where there is an annual festival with a grand wax procession, competitive boat racing as well as traditional northeastern cultural performances among many other joyous activities.

NOVEMBER

Loi Krathong, Sukhothai and Chiang Mai, It is believed that the Loi Krathong Festival originated in Sukhothai, the first Thai capital. It is therefore appropriate that this captivating event is held on the month amid the breathtaking ruins of the glorious ancient city. Activities include krathong floating a fireworks display, cultural performances and an amazing light and sound show. In Chiang Mai there is an unusual ritual associated with the Loi Krathong Festival. This is the launching of Lanna-style hot air balloons, which are considered by local art and cultural performances, various fun-filled competitions, and local products sales and exhibitions.

Traditional Boat Races, Buri Ram, Nakhon Ratchasima and Nakhon Phanom, These annual festivals held for more than a century, the traditional longboat races draw thousands of visitors from all over. These events are further enhanced by local art and cultural performances, various fun-filled competitions, and local products sales and exhibitions.

Surin Elephant Round-Up Show, Surin, Introduced in 1960, this internationally famous yearly event attracts people from all over the world to Surin to see more than one hundred elephants participate in spectacular shows that include colourful processions, tug-of-war between elephants and demonstrations of log-pulling skills along with various other extraordinary acts set in a carnival atmosphere.

Rever Kwai Bridge Week Fair, Kanchanaburi, Each year in late November to early December, the world famous River Kwai Bridge, which was built by allied prisoners-Bridge, which was War II, becomes the focal point of celebrations. Highlights include historical and archaeological exhibitions, a carnival, folk and cultural performance, rides on World War II vintage trains, and a spectacular light and sound presentation re-enacting the bridge's World War II history.

DECEMBER

His Majesty The King's Birthday Celebrations, December 5, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the world's longest reigning monarch, is well beloved and deeply respected by all Thais old and young. The occasion of his royal birthday provides his loyal subjects the opportunity to express their reverence for him. All over the country, buildings and homes are elaborately decorated and the area around the Grand Palace is spectacularly illuminated.

Ayutthaya World Heritage Site Celebration Ayutthaya, Designated a UNESCO World heritage site in 1991, Ayutthaya, an ancient Siamese capital, celebrates its glorious past with

displays of traditional culture and lifestyles, numerous forms of entertainment, as well as spectacular light and sound presentations amid the ruins of this ancient city.

The Phuket King's Cup Regatta, Phuket, Designated a UNESCO World heritage Site in 1991, Ayutthaya, an ancient Siamese capital, celebrates its glorious past with displays of traditional culture and lifestyles, numerous forms of entertainment, as well as spectacular light and sound presentations amid the ruins of this ancient city.



PUBLIC HOLIDAYS IN INDONESIA

1. **January 1**
New Year's Day

2. **February 14**
Magha Puja
3. **April 6**
Chakri Memorial Day
4. **April 7**
Chakri Day – Observed
5. **April 13 – 16**
Songkran
6. **May 1**
Labor Day
7. **May 5**
Coronation Day
8. **May 13**
Vesak Day
9. **July 11**
Asalha Puja
10. **August 12**
The Queen’s Birthday
11. **October 23**
Chulalongkorn Day
12. **December 5**
The King’s Birthday
13. **December 10**
Constitution Day
14. **December 31**
New Year’s Eve

SHOPPING

Bangkok’s night markets on Patpong and Sukhumvit Roads are ideal places to pick up souvenirs or gifts for those back home, while more impressive gifts can be procured from retailers such as certified antiques dealers, gem and jewellery shops, or Jim Thompson, the famous silk pioneer. In regards to gems and antiques, it should be noted that there are numerous occurrences of scams involving antiques and gems, and restrictions on the export of Buddha images. Otherwise, with the right guidance there are genuine opportunities to make some brilliant shopping discoveries.

Getting clothes tailor made in Bangkok is a top priority for many, though boutique shops in Siam Square feature the latest ready-to-wear designs from the city’s chic young designers. Meanwhile, in Chinatown, almost every conceivable knick-knack and trinket is for sale in the myriad mazes of back alleys, while those shopping for gold can do so along the district’s Yaowarat Road.



TIPS TO SAVVY SHOPPING

1. **Check everything** you can check before handing over your money
2. Always **ask around to get an idea of basic prices** for common necessities. For more important purchases, try and get a local friend to go along with you, or better still, let them do the buying without you
3. **Don't feel awkward or rude about bargaining**, everyone bargains in Thailand and you'll look like a green tourist if you don't
4. Don't look happy or resigned about paying what you're asked; always **begin by showing your gentle disapproval**
5. **Walk away if you cannot agree on a price**: either they'll come after you or you'll find the same thing on sale somewhere else

VISA INFORMATION

The Thai government allows nationals from the following countries to stay in Thailand for tourism purposes for up to 30 days without an entry visa:

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bahrain, Brunei, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong SAR, Iceland, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Kuwait, Luxemburg, Malaysia, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Peru, the Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, USA, Vietnam, Czech Republic, Republic of Hungary, Principality of Liechtenstein, Republic of Poland, Slovak Republic, Republic of Slovenia.

Documents required include a passport with validity for more than six months, completed visa application form, recent 4 x 6 cm passport photograph, confirmed air ticket paid in full, evidence of adequate finance (THB20,000 per person or THB40,000 per family).

Visa fee is THB1,000, although this fee can change without prior notice.

Validity is for 30 or 60 days for nationals of countries on Thailand's Tourist Visa Exemption List.

Extensions for anyone wishing to stay longer or wishing to change their status on a visa, they must file an application form at the Office of Immigration Bureau located on Soi Suan Plu, off South Sathon Road, Bangkok. Any extension of stay or change of visa is at the discretion of the immigration officer.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION- TAX FREE

The Thai law imposes limits on what you may, and may not bring into the country.

1. One litre of alcoholic beverages but a maximum of 33 fluid ounces
2. 200 cigarettes or 250 g of tobacco or cigars
3. Personal belongings in reasonable amount of owner's use and not a total exceeding THB10,000
4. ANY EXCESS must be dropped into the customs box to avoid prosecution . Please make sure your passport is valid more than 6 months from the date of departure of each country you are visiting. Also, make sure you have enough blank pages – you may need up to 1.5 pages for each country you visit in Southeast Asia.