

Kingdom of Thailand (Prathet Thai)



Location: Asia

Status: UN Member Country

Capital City: Bangkok (*Krung Thep*)

Main Cities: Chiang Mai, Chon Buri, Phuket

Population: 66,000,000

Area: 513,120 km²

Currency: Baht (THB)

Languages: Thai, Chinese, Malay

Religions: Buddhist, Muslim

Calling code: +66

Drive on the left

As one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, Thailand has something for everyone with its rich culture and exotic adventures. Whether you are there to relax on one of the stunning beaches in the south, trek through the northern jungle, or indulge in sumptuous cuisine in the bustling capital city, the 'Land of Smiles' is the perfect holiday destination.

Best time to go

Anytime is a good time to visit Thailand. The high season is typically November through April when it is a bit dryer and cooler. To avoid the crowds, go from May to October.

General Information

Passport and visa

A passport with at least six months validity from the date of entry is required. Visitors from most countries who arrive in Thailand without a visa will be granted a 30 day stay if they have proof of an onward ticket and adequate funds. Some nationalities will need to pay around 1000 THB for a visa on arrival. A very select few nationalities cannot apply for a visa on arrival. We advise that you contact the Thai embassy or consulate in your country of origins for complete information. For longer stays, a visa should be applied for before departure. You need to enter Thailand within 90 days of the visa being issued, otherwise it will be invalid.

Money

Major credit cards are accepted by hotels and large shops but cash, in the form of the local currency Thai Baht, is the preferred tender elsewhere. Traveller's cheques are not generally accepted outside of hotels, so change them for cash at a bank exchange which you'll find in most tourist spots. ATM's are also widely available and accept most international cards. Several banks have restrictions on ATM card use abroad, thus we advise to verify this with your bank before departure.

Post and telecommunications

The Thai postal service is very reliable and there are also courier services widely available. Calling abroad is easy but expensive. Internet access is available in all major tourist places and you will find WiFi in most cafes in more built up areas.

Transportation

Traffic in Bangkok can be very bad, especially during the rainy season. Using the Metro or Sky Train is by far the fastest and most convenient way to get around. However, these do not cover the entire city. If using a taxi, try to make sure you get one on the meter. Tuk-tuks are another way of getting around. These motorised, three wheel cars tend to be more expensive than meter taxis, and prices are negotiated beforehand.

Motorbike taxis: Travel by motorbike in Thailand is not safe and under no circumstances is this sanctioned or recommended. Please note that travel by motorbike is not usually covered by insurance. Please check the fine print of your travel insurance policy to be sure of your coverage.

Health and Safety

Climate

Thailand has a tropical monsoon climate.

April and May are the hottest months of the year when even the locals complain about the heat.

June sees the beginning of the South West Monsoon, and brings with it the rainy season, which continues intermittently until the end of October.

From November to the end of February, the weather is cooler and less humid.

The North and North-East are generally cooler than Bangkok in the winter and hotter in the summer. In the far north, around Mae Hong Son, temperatures can occasionally drop as low as 20C.

Health and wellbeing

Healthcare in Thailand is some of the best in South East Asia, with most hospitals offering a Western level of service. However, be aware that it can be expensive. Each traveller is responsible for his or her own health. First and foremost, make sure that you have travel insurance for your trip.

Vaccinations

Before travelling to Thailand, please ensure you have adequate protection against disease. Contact your doctor for the latest medical advice on the vaccinations you need, no less than two months before your departure. Be aware that there is malaria risk in rural parts of Thailand.

Travel insurance (compulsory)

We do everything possible to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip. However, travel inevitably involves some risk and this should be recognised by holidaymakers. Travel insurance is a cost effective way of protecting yourself and your equipment should any problems occur such as cancelled trips, delays, medical emergencies, baggage loss or damage. It also gives you peace of mind. Please make sure your travel insurance covers all activities planned on your trip.

Culture & Customs

Etiquette and cultural differences

Experiencing different cultures is one of the joys of travelling, and it is important that these differences are respected. Thailand has cultural norms and taboos which we encourage visitors to understand and abide by.

Try not to get angry. Losing face by shouting or becoming abusive is one of the biggest faux pas in Thailand. It is extremely impolite and unlikely to achieve a positive outcome.

Refrain from public displays of affection, they are considered offensive. It is rare to see couples holding hands. However, it is quite common for friends of the same sex.

It is polite to remove your shoes before entering a house – look for shoes at the front door as a clue.

Thais greet each other with a slight bow and a prayer-like gesture, with the younger or lower-ranked person usually initiating the gesture. For foreigners and business, handshakes are acceptable.

Temple visit etiquette

Foreigners are always welcome in temples. However, it is important that a few simple rules of etiquette are followed:

Dress appropriately and act with the utmost respect when visiting Wats and temples.

Do not wear shorts or tank tops and make sure your shoulders and knees are covered.

Remove your shoes and hat before going into a monastery.

If you sit down in front of the dais (the platform on which the Buddha's are placed), sit with your feet to the side rather than in the lotus position.

Never point your finger or the soles of your feet towards a person or a figure of the Buddha.

A woman may accept something from a monk but should never touch a monk.

Show Respect and turn off mobile phones, remove headphones, lower your voice and avoid inappropriate conversation.

Food and drink

Thailand's cuisine is regarded by many people as some of the best in the world. Rich with citrus, coriander and liberal helpings of fresh chillies, the food has a characteristic tang that many fall in love with. Like all other Buddhist countries, vegetarian food is available in most restaurants.

Here are some popular dishes:

Tom Yum Goong (spicy shrimp soup)

Pad Thai (Thai style fried noodles)

Som Tum (spicy green papaya salad)

Khao Pad (fried rice)

GaengKeow Wan Kai (chicken green curry)

KhaoNiaoMamuang (sticky rice in coconut milk, served with mango)

Water

It is not advisable to drink tap water in Thailand. Bottled water is recommended but do check the expiry date before opening. Ice is widely used and is produced with treated water.

Public holidays

There are many public holidays in Thailand. The main one is the Thai New Year called Songkran. Songkran is celebrated all over the country, with its highlight in Chiang Mai where celebrations go on for over a week. Many Thai people travel back to their hometowns to visit local temples during this time. Be aware that this can make transportation more difficult. The most notable way of celebrating Songkran is by splashing water on each other. Large water fights break out across the country and innocent bystanders are favoured targets. Store your valuables and electronics carefully!

Helpful tips

Donations and gift giving

Although there is poverty in certain areas of Thailand, please read the following points about donations and gift giving.

Do not give money to people begging, especially children. This reinforces the belief that begging is an acceptable way to make a living. If children make money from begging, their parents are less likely to send them to school. Children working on the streets are also vulnerable to abuse. Giving money and goods to beggars can accentuate an unequal relationship between locals and visitors, with tourists being seen as purely money givers.

Do not give sweets to children in villages that we visit.

Do not feel that you necessarily have to give material things. Sometimes, giving your friendship, time and interest to locals can be the best gift of all.

Tipping

Tipping is a personal matter and travellers are encouraged to tip any amount they feel is appropriate. For your convenience, we have included a suggested tipping guide below:

Bellboy: 10-20 baht per suitcase / bag

Chambermaid: 20 – 40 baht per day

Guides: 100 – 150 baht per day for guides (depending on group size and performance)

Drivers: 100 per day, per person

Restaurants: in smart establishments you may find that the tip is already included in the bill. In local restaurants tips are not expected but you may wish to leave loose change on the table.

Price guide

Generally, things are cheap in Thailand. However as a tourist you will get overcharged if you are not careful. Haggling is considered a sport when it comes to non-food products. Always stay calm and polite and you'll be surprised at the discounts you may get. Be aware that many items for sale on street stands are counterfeit.

Street food

Phad Thai: THB 25 –50

Rice dish: THB 30 – 60

Restaurants

Western dishes: from THB 150

Thai dishes: from THB 80

Drinks

Soft drinks THB 10 – 20

Beer: THB 50 – 70

Fruit juice: THB 20 - 30

Water: THB 10 - 15

Other Items

DVDs (real): THB 100 - 200

SIM card: THB 100

Mobile phone: from THB 1000

Pre-departure checklist

Travel insurance

Passport with at least six months validity from date of entry

Photocopy of passport

Visa or visa on arrival

Vaccinations

ATM cards/travellers cheques

All relevant tickets

Reconfirmed flights

Lightweight clothing

Long-sleeved shirts and trousers (recommended for evenings)

Electrical adaptor: 220V, 50Hz; 2 pin plugs

A small bag/backpack for day and overnight trips

Appropriate shoes for trekking, cycling and walking

Insect repellent

Sunscreen

Medication/first aid kit

Please note: *Domestic airlines impose restrictions on baggage at approx 20kg maximum, so travel lightly where possible. Also be aware that train and boat cabins have limited space.*