

thailand fact file



thai embassy in uk	Address: 29–30 Queen's Gate, London, SW7 5JB Telephone: (020) 7589 2944 Facsimile: (020) 7823 9695
british embassy in thailand	Address: 1031 Wireless Road, Lumpini Pathumwan, Bangkok 10330. Telephone: (02) 2305 8333
tourist authority in thailand	Address: 49 Albermarle Street, London W1X 3FE. Telephone: 020 7499 7679
area	517,000 square kilometres
population	61.5 million
capital	Bangkok (population 6 million plus)
language	Thai
tipping	Tipping is standard practice - Small tips are always appreciated.
bank opening hours	Usually 9am to 3.30pm on weekdays but in tourist areas they are often open for longer hours and at weekends. Banks are closed on public holidays.
post office hours	In Bangkok post-offices are usually open from 8am to 8pm on weekdays and from 8am to 1pm on weekends. Outside of Bangkok normal opening hours are 8.30am to 4.30pm weekdays and 9am to noon on weekends. Some larger post offices are also open on Sundays.
office opening hours	Usually 8.30am to 5pm on weekdays, and sometimes Saturday mornings. Larger shops tend to open for longer hours.
time (+/- GMT)	Six hours ahead of GMT
electricity	220V 50Hz. Outlets are normally round, two pole. An adapter can be bought cheaply in Bangkok the first day.
public holidays	There are an incredible number of public holiday festivals and fairs, especially between November and February. The exact dates tend to vary each year. You can obtain a list of major events and festivals from TAT in London.
telephone	Thailand has an efficient telephone system operated by the Telephone Organisation of Thailand (TOT). From Bangkok you can direct-dial most major centres with little difficulty. Dial 001 before the number when dialling direct to the UK or 007 / 008 / 009 for a reduce call rate. For operator-assisted international calls dial 100. The country code for Thailand is 66. Please check with your mobile phone provider if your network & contract enable you to have coverage in Thailand.
e mail	E-mail and Internet access is widespread and relatively inexpensive.
postal	Thailand has a very efficient postal service with a range of international services. The poste restante service is very reliable.
exchange money	Exchange your money in-country. The banks and legal moneychangers offer the best rates & the airport has them in abundance. On a Tourist Visa you are legally required to have access to \$250/£140, although you are unlikely to be asked.
currency	Thailand Baht. As of August 2009 £1 = 56.13 THB. For up to date currency exchange, go to www.xe.com . Debit & credit cards can also be used to withdraw cash & are the best way of accessing money. ATMs are available in provincial capitals and many smaller towns. Many hotels, shops and restaurants will accept credit cards. Visa and MasterCard credit-card holders can get cash advances in some banks, please check with your credit card provider for details.
passport and visa	UK citizens must have a full ten-year passport and this must be valid for at least six months beyond your return date. By law, tourists are expected to carry their passports at all times. UK citizens are not required to obtain visas prior to departure for Thailand. You will be issued with a free 30 day Tourist Visa on arrival. Ensure that your passport is stamped on arrival, especially if you cross over a land border. Do not overstay your welcome. You are automatically fined for each day you remain in Thailand beyond the date stamped in your passport. If you cannot pay you could be arrested.

shopping

You will be able to obtain many bargains in Thailand, notably textiles, clothing, jewellery, lacquer-ware, ceramics and other crafts. You may be able to obtain some interesting hill-tribe crafts in Sangklaburi Province. In Bangkok and elsewhere you will come across an array of fake and pirated goods, some of it illegal, some of it good value. Generally you will be able to obtain anything that you would require at home and particularly in Bangkok you'll find familiar department stores and huge shopping complexes.

vaccination and health

UK citizens require no compulsory immunisation. Nomad Travel Stores Medical Centre recommends the following vaccinations: diphtheria; tetanus; poliomyelitis; hepatitis A; typhoid. They also sometimes advise: tuberculosis; rabies; Japanese B encephalitis; hepatitis B. There is no risk of Malaria in cities and main tourist areas such as Phuket, Pattaya, Bangkok, Chiangmai, Kanchanaburi and offshore islands except Ko Chang. Sangklaburi District is a low risk malarial area & it is not essential to take malarial medication however please consult your local travel clinic for further information. Malaria precautions are advised in Ko Chang and along the borders of Laos Cambodia and Myanmar, all year round. Avoid mosquito bites by covering up with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers especially after sunset, using insect repellents on exposed skin and, when necessary, sleeping under a mosquito net. Also see Health notes.

water

Do not drink tap water unless it has been boiled or filtered. Bottled water is cheap and readily available. It is fine to drink the water served in restaurants. Also see Health notes.

climate

Thailand has a tropical climate and is relatively hot and humid all year round. It has a dry cooler season from November to March, a dry hot season from March to May and a monsoon period from May to September. See the Q&A for your chosen expedition for more information.

geography

Thailand's shape on the map has been compared to the head of an elephant with its trunk extending down the Malay peninsula. The longest north-south distance is over 1800km. There are four main zones; the fertile central region, the north-east plateau, the mountainous northern region and the southern peninsula. There are also hundreds of oceanic and continental islands. Thailand borders with Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Malaysia.

the people

There are a wide range of ethnic minorities in Thailand including Malays, Khmer & Mon. In the mountainous areas of the north and west there are also a wide range of ethnic minority 'hilltribes', including the Hmong, Karen, Lahu, Lisu, Akha and Yao people.

culture and customs

Thai people have a sense of fun or playfulness (sanuk), the avoidance of confrontation or embarrassment (saving face), deference to social rank and status (client-patron relationship) and a notion of ideal behaviour or 'Thai-ness'. The latter includes the ability to speak Thai and discretion in behaviour towards the opposite sex, modest dress, a neat and clean appearance and a premium placed on quiet, subtle and indirect expression and comportment. This notion of 'Thai-ness' is heavily influenced by the main religion, Buddhism. Feet are the lowest part of the body spiritually, so do not point your feet at people or point at things (especially monks and Buddha images) with your feet. The head is the highest part of the body spiritually, so do not touch Thais on the head or ruffle their hair. It is very rude. Don't step over people or sit on pillows meant for sleeping.

do's and don'ts

- ? There are two fundamental rules in Thailand: Do not insult the monarchy or religion & respect Thai nationhood (i.e. the monarchy and Buddhism).
- ? In temples, dress neatly and remove your shoes before entering. Shorts and sleeveless shirts should not be worn in temples and it is regarded as improper to pose in front of Buddha images. Monks are not supposed to touch or be touched by women.
- ? Beach-style clothing is appropriate for the beach and sports and nowhere else. You will gain contempt or disrespect from many Thais if you choose not to observe this particularly if your inappropriate clothing is also dirty. Sandals and slip-ons, however, are fine for all but the most formal occasions. Public nudity causes offence and nude bathing is actually illegal. Shoes of any type are not worn inside the home or many guest-houses and shops.
- ? In the jungle - Eating and visiting peoples' homes will present you with a range of other behavioural considerations and you may enjoy learning and practising these during your stay. You will also be advised on specific customs and taboos when staying with your Karen guests.
- ? Do not get involved in any way with drugs. Penalties are very severe - 10 to 50 years' imprisonment or the death penalty is the normal punishment. Travellers caught with even the smallest amount of drugs at the airport are prosecuted for trafficking. Amphetamines are regarded as a Class A drug, ie in the same category as Heroin.
- ? Be on your guard against pickpockets and bag snatchers as you would be in any busy tourist resort.
- ? Never accept a drink or food from a stranger, they may be drugged.
- ? Do not buy gems, except from a reputable dealer. If you are approached in the street by a stranger and asked if you want to buy jewellery very cheaply it is advised that you decline the offer. The usual practice is for a tuk tuk driver to approach tourists in the street and offer them transport then take them to a jewellery shop, suggesting that buying jewellery in Thailand and selling it at a profit on returning home can make money. This is not true. Once the bait is accepted the tourist is taken to a shop(s) and sold jewellery with the promise to send it by post their home country. When jewellery is valued it is found to be worth only a fraction of the amount paid.
- ? Do not have sexual relations with anyone under the age of 18. Thailand recognises such acts as rape
- ? Do not ride a scooter in Thailand - An average of 38 people die per day on motorcycles in Thailand.