



Thailand Facts, Figures & Contacts

Congratulations on choosing to visit Thailand, one of the Orient's most unique countries. A world famous tourist destination, Thailand is renowned for its rich cultural traditions, wonderful festivals, superb handicrafts and natural wonder.

Language & Culture

Thai is the official language. However, English is widely understood, particularly in Bangkok with English spoken in most hotels, shops and restaurants in the major tourist destinations.

Approximately 95 percent of Thailand's population is Buddhist, so every representation of Buddha, large or small, ruined or not, is regarded as a sacred object. Never climb on to Buddhist statues or do anything that may show a lack of respect. This includes photo opportunities.

The Thai people regard the head as the highest part of the body, both literally and figuratively. Therefore, they do not appreciate anyone patting or touching their heads, even as a friendly gesture. Feet are then considered the lowest point of the body, so don't point them at people, or point at things with your feet as it is considered rude. And never touch any part of someone else's body with your foot.

When you meet a Thai person it is important to remember that shaking hands is not one of their customs. Instead, when Thai people greet one another they press their palms together in a prayer-like gesture, called Wai.

Monarchy and religion are sacred and highly regarded in Thailand. Thais are tolerant of most behaviour as long as it doesn't insult one of these.

Health

Travellers are advised not to drink tap water. All water should be boiled before use. This includes water for cleaning teeth. However, bottled water is readily available.

Beware of ordering drinks with ice and eating salad vegetables or fruit, which may have been washed in local water. In the event of illness, most major tourist destinations have hospitals and clinics staffed by well-trained doctors and nurses. Some hotels will have in-house doctors, or doctors who are on call, but you will be expected to pay for this service.

Precaution is advised against cholera, typhoid and malaria, but check with your local doctor well in advance of your departure date.

Summary of vaccinations recommended for South East Asia:

Tetanus, Measles, influenza, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Malaria Prophylaxis

Local Currency

The local unit of currency is the Baht. Coins come in denominations of 25-satang and 50-satang, 1B, 5B and 10B. Paper currency comes in denominations of 10B (brown), 20B (green), 50B (blue), 100B (red), 50B (purple) and 1000B (beige).

Traveller's cheques can be easily exchanged in Bangkok, at banks, hotels or authorised money changers. Usually you will get the best rate when dealing with banks or legal money changers. It is recommended you check beforehand if a commission will be charged. Most medium-to-large towns have ATM's, while major credit cards are widely accepted throughout Thailand.

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Climate & Clothing

Thailand has a tropical climate ruled by monsoons. Generally the seasons can be divided into the hot season from March through to May, the rainy season from June through until October, where rain is spasmodic and rarely occurs in long spells, clearing quickly to hot days with sunshine and clear skies. Then there is the cool season which lasts from November through to February. Most of Thailand is also very humid, with an overall average humidity of 66 to 82 percent depending on the season and time of day.

Throughout your stay in Thailand, light loose clothing is best. Sweaters may be needed during evenings in the cool season, or if visiting mountainous areas. Sandals and slip-on shoes are OK, except for formal occasions. Shorts (except knee length walking shorts), sleeveless shirts, tank tops and other beach style attire is not considered appropriate dress in Thailand for anything other than sporting events and the Thai people find public nudity quite offensive. It is important to keep in mind the role religion plays in the every day life of the Thai people and dress accordingly, even when you are not visiting sacred sights.

Visitors should dress neatly at all religious shrines, never go shirtless or wear shorts, as your knees must be covered. Ladies shoulders must be covered at all times in areas of religious significance. Shoes should be removed when entering private Thai homes, chapels where Buddhist images are kept and any of the Islamic community's mosques.

Getting Around

There are a number of ways to get around during your stay in Thailand, while it may be daunting initially, once you become familiar with the transport systems you will find you can get almost anywhere.

Traffic can often make moving throughout Bangkok difficult. The Sky Train is one of the most efficient forms of transport to avoid the inevitable peak hour traffic jams on the road. The Sky Train is a fast and affordable way to travel around Bangkok city; it runs daily from 6:00am until midnight. Jump on the Sky Train and it only takes eight minutes in air-conditioned comfort to travel from Siam Square to the fantastic weekend markets.

City buses are another cheap way to travel around the city. Travellers are advised to be aware of your belongings on Bangkok's buses, as theft is common. The trick is to be relaxed but remain aware. Taxi's travelling the streets of Bangkok are metered. Drivers understand some English, but have the hotel Concierge write down your destination and hotel name in Thai to avoid any difficulties.

Tuk-Tuks really aren't necessary to get around Bangkok anymore. While these three wheeled open-air vehicles are quite noisy and are open to traffic fumes, they do offer a unique, fun-filled experience. They are inexpensive, but be sure to bargain for the fare first.

Shopping, Business hours & Tipping

Thailand is famous for its shopping bargains, but there are a few things to be aware of. Always haggle to get the best price, except in department stores where prices are fixed. When bartering you can generally expect to obtain a final figure 10 to 40 percent lower than the original asking price, but success depends heavily on your skills and the shop keeper's mood. It will help to remember that Thai people appreciate good manners and a sense of humour, so, with patience and a broad smile, not only will you receive a better price, shopping will also become an art.

There are many different markets and places to shop while in Thailand. Patpong Night Market is very popular with tourists and has a combination of souvenirs, replica brand name items and cheap clothes available, as do many of the tourist areas in the city. The Chatuchak Weekend Market is also a great place to shop with an estimated 200,000 visitors passing through everyday. At the Chatachak Markets you will find everything from live chickens and snakes to opium pipes, herbal remedies, Thai clothing, musical instruments, crafts and antiques, as well as some very good food.

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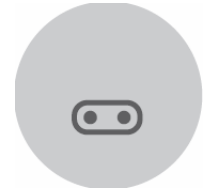


Banks are generally open Monday to Friday 9:30am until 3.30pm and are closed on public and bank holidays. Most large stores are open from 10:00am until 6:30 or 7:00pm, but smaller shops may open earlier and close later.

It is customary to tip hotel personnel who have provided good personal service. A 10 to 15 percent tip is appreciated in restaurants, particularly where a service charge has been waived.

Electricity

The electrical current is 220 volts, at 50 cycles AC. Electrical supply shops in Thailand will usually carry adapters for different international plug shapes, as well as voltage converters.



Passports, Visas & Taxes

All visitors entering Thailand must possess valid passports with at least 6 months validity. Australian passport holders may visit up to 30 days without a visa provided they have a ticket for onward travel. Longer visits require a visa. Check with your travel agent for full details.

For travel up to/including 01 February 2007: When leaving Thailand a 700 baht tax is payable by everyone two years of age and over. This tax is payable at the airline counter or automatic booth before entering passport control. If you are flying domestically from Koh Samui and intend staying longer in Thailand, you must also pay an additional private airport surcharge of 400 baht per person.

For travel from 01 February 2007 onwards: Departure taxes/ Passenger Service Charges mentioned above will no longer be paid locally. They will be included in airfare pricing, and issued to show on the airline ticket. This information is a guide only and it is essential that you check all current passport and visa rules with your travel agent before departure.

Travel Insurance

We strongly recommend comprehensive travel insurance against loss of deposit through cancellation, cancellation charges, baggage loss and medical expenses. Check with your travel agent for information.

Customs Allowance

Like most countries, Thailand prohibits the importation of illegal drugs, firearms and pornographic media. The duty free allowance for visitors coming into Thailand is up to 200 cigarettes and up to 250 grams of loose tobacco plus one litre each of wine or spirits and a reasonable quantity of personal effects. Creative Holidays recommends you check with your travel agent before your departure as allowances may change.

Assistance Abroad

The Australian Embassy
37 South Sathorn Road
Bangkok 10120
Thailand

IMPORTANT: This information sheet is for guidance only and although accurate at time of printing, cannot be guaranteed at the time of travel.

Source: Creative Holidays

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