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THAILAND GUIDE

wordtravels



From idyllic beaches with turquoise seas and white sands, to bustling cities sporting exotic markets, and a vibrant, colourful nightlife, it is easy to see why Thailand has become one of the most popular tourist destinations for the adventurous and young at heart.

A turbulent, bloody history spanning several millennia has left Thailand scattered with ruins, forgotten temples and deserted cities, revealing a rich tableau of past eras that contrasts sharply with the more modern aspects of the nation's contemporary face.

As Thailand's tourist industry has boomed, helped to some extent by Hollywood's influence (the country has been the setting for movies like *The Man with the Golden Gun*, *The Bridge over River Kwai*, and Alex Garland's *The Beach*), numerous large and luxurious resorts have been developed. Yet, for those with a smaller budget, many cheap, comfortable but more basic accommodation options are still readily available on the islands and beaches.

The size and geographical diversity of Thailand provides for a variety of activities: snorkelling, diving and a host of watersports are very popular around the islands, while inland enthusiasts can trek into the mountains or cycle along the flat river areas of the northeast. Bustling, crowded cities like Bangkok display the wilder urban side of Thailand, ensuring the country has something to offer everyone who visits.

THE BASICS

TIME

GMT +7

ELECTRICITY

220 volts, 50Hz. Both flat and round two-pin plugs are used.

LANGUAGE

Thai is the official language, although English is widely spoken in tourist areas.

TRAVEL HEALTH

As a health precaution, travellers should take medical advice at least three weeks before travelling to Thailand. There is no malaria risk in major tourist resorts or in the cities of Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Pattaya, Ko Samui, and Ko Phangan. But in rural, forested areas that border Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, and Laos, preventions against malaria are recommended and immunisation against hepatitis A and typhoid fever is also advised. Yellow fever vaccination certificates are required for travellers from infected areas. There has been an increase in reported cases of dengue fever, particularly in the south, and vaccination against Japanese encephalitis is also recommended. Outbreaks of leptospirosis occur during the rainy season and after flooding. There have been outbreaks of waterborne diseases in the Provinces of Khon Kaen, Lop Buri, Phitsanulok and Prachin Buri. Outbreaks of cholera have also been reported. You should drink or use only boiled or bottled water and avoid ice in drinks. If you suffer from diarrhoea during your visit you should seek immediate medical attention. HIV/AIDS is prevalent in the major cities and resorts. Medical facilities are good in major cities, but good medical insurance is vital - without insurance, or cash/credit card, travellers will not be treated. Bangkok has excellent international hospitals.

TIPPING

Tipping is not expected, but is becoming more common in places frequented by tourists. Tipping 10 to 15 percent on a restaurant bill is usual, but ultimately this is left up to the customer to decide based on service performance. Sometimes a 10 percent service charge is added to the bill at hotels and restaurants, but this is not common. All help with carrying bags, tour guides etc. welcome small tips. Taxi drivers are not generally tipped.

SAFETY INFORMATION

Although the political situation in Thailand is currently more stable than before, there have been major political demonstrations in Bangkok in recent months accompanied by outbreaks of violence. Tourists have not been targeted during the protests, but travellers are advised to avoid all political gatherings and marches and to stay well-informed about the situation in the country. Travellers should check out the official travel alerts for

Thailand before visiting, and should be careful to abide by any curfews or other rules imposed by the Thai government.

There is a threat from terrorism throughout South East Asia and travellers should be particularly vigilant in public places, including tourist resorts. Avoid the border areas and don't camp in undesignated areas in national parks. The security situation in the southern provinces near the Malaysian border is unstable and travel to Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat and Songkhla is to be avoided.

Visitors to major cities are advised to secure their passports and credit cards and not carry too much money or jewellery. In Bangkok visitors should be aware of scams, often involving gems recommended by kind strangers. In tourist areas, particularly at the Full Moon Party on Ko Phan Ngan, be careful about accepting drinks from strangers as there have been reports of drinks being drugged. Incidents of sexual assault do occur and female travellers should be cautious.

The monsoon season in September and October (November to March on Koh Samui) brings about flooding in the north, northeast and central regions, causing mudslides and flash floods; visitors planning to trek in the jungle during this time should check conditions with licensed tour guides before leaving.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Public displays of affection are frowned upon. Dress is informal, although beachwear should be confined to the beach. Drugs are illegal and travellers should know that possession of even small quantities can lead to imprisonment, and that drug traffickers risk the death penalty. Avoid touching others hair or head (rubbing a child's hair, for example), as this is a disrespectful gesture. Taking off one's shoes when entering a home is customary, although most shops and restaurants do not always expect tourists to remove their footwear. Do not put your feet on table or chairs, as lifting a foot toward someone, especially the underside of the foot is considered a disrespectful gesture. Although haggling is common when buying items, especially at markets, Thais are generally very calm and soft spoken people. Arguing loudly or raising one's voice when haggling is deemed disrespectful in Thai culture.

BUSINESS

Business culture in Thailand is considerably more relaxed than other Asian countries within the region. However, Thailand shares its neighbours' work ethic and value systems, as well as emphasis on hierarchy and building relationships. Senior managers must be consulted on all matters and decisions. Appearance and age are important in Thai business culture as they illustrate social standing and status. Older individuals are generally afforded a great deal of regard in Thailand. Building relationships is central to business culture in Thailand. It is ill regarded for a businessman to start negotiating before being properly acquainted with his business associates.

The concept of 'face' and saving face is important in Thailand; so if you make a mistake, don't expect it to be pointed out to you. Also, if a business associate makes a mistake, it is impolite to draw attention to it or correct them. In 2010, Thailand was the fastest growing economy in SouthEast Asia. Despite this, Thais value family time and time to actually live life. Placing family in front of business priorities is the norm.

English is the language of business in Thailand, but translators are often needed. Business hours are from 8am to 5pm or 9am to 6pm with an hour for lunch. Dress styles tend to be quite formal, but due to the humid climate, heavy suits are rare. However, meetings with senior management tend to be slightly more formal and jackets are usually worn. Men generally wear shirts, slacks and a tie while women wear below-the-knee skirts and blouses. Pants-suits for women are quite rare.

Shaking hands is not a popular form of greeting and the wai (putting cupped hands in front of oneself and bowing slightly) is more acceptable. The higher the hands compared to the face when bowing, the more respect is meant by the wai. It is customary to wai first to those older than oneself. When addressing others, Thais use first names rather than surnames preceded by Kuhn for both men and women. As with many Asian nations, giving gifts to business associates is generally a good idea. When receiving gifts, don't open them in front of the giver. Wait to be introduced to others, as it is an indication of rank. Often the hierarchical structures favour the elders in a group and respect must be given accordingly.

COMMUNICATIONS

The international country dialling code for Thailand is +66. The outgoing code is 001, followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 00144 for the United Kingdom). City/area codes are in use. To dial a mobile in Thailand a 6, 8 or 9 must precede the city code. International direct dial facilities are available throughout most of the country. Mobile phone networks cover most towns, cities and holiday resorts; operators use GSM 900, 1800 and 1900 networks. Internet cafés are available in the main towns and resorts.

DUTY FREE

Travellers to Thailand do not have to pay duty on 200 cigarettes, 250g tobacco or equivalent amount of cigars or 1 litre of alcohol. Goods to the value of THB 20,000 per person for holders of tourist visas are allowed. Family allowances are double the individual allowances. Prohibited items include firearms and ammunition, fireworks, and drugs. Trafficking in drugs carries the maximum penalty. Restrictions apply to meat imported from countries affected by BSE or mad cow and foot-and-mouth diseases. Antiques or objects of art and religious articles may not be exported without a license.

CLIMATE

The climate in Thailand experiences high temperatures and humidity levels throughout the year. The hottest months in Thailand are between March and May, and monsoon season runs from June to October. In September and October much of the country suffers from flooding, particularly in the north, northeastern and central regions. The cool season is the best time to visit Thailand, running from November to February. Temperatures are fairly consistent throughout the year, especially in southern regions, ranging between 74°F (23°C) and 86°F (30°C).

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR SOUTH AFRICANS

South African passports must be valid for six months beyond date of arrival. No visa is required for touristic stays of up to 30 days.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR AMERICANS

US passports must be valid for six months beyond date of arrival. No visa is required for tourist stays of up to 30 days.

PASSPORT/VISA

Travellers entering Thailand are required to prove they have sufficient funds to cover the length of their stay, and are recommended to hold documentation for return/onward travel. As of February 2017, if visitors are using the 30 day visa exemption, they can only enter Thailand through a land border twice per calendar year. To cross more frequently, travellers must obtain a visa in advance of travelling. It is highly recommended that passports are valid for six months beyond travel.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Baht (THB), which is divided into 100 satang. Currency can be exchanged at the airport, banks, hotels and bureaux de change. Banks are open Monday to Friday. ATMs are available in most cities and tourist resorts, but there is a surcharge for each withdrawal. Most major credit cards are accepted at hotels and larger businesses.

BANGKOK

Chaotic, carnal and congested, Thailand's capital is divided by the Chao Phraya River and is nestled in one of the world's most fertile rice-producing deltas. Bangkok's 605 square miles (1,568 sq km) are criss-crossed by a series of canals carrying passengers and cargo, its roads clogged with endless traffic jams, while the city sprawls in all directions with a hodgepodge of urban, commercial and industrial buildings. A new overland metropolitan railway speeds above the city, providing visitors with a relaxed and efficient way to observe the hustle and bustle below.

Despite its pollution and overcrowding, Bangkok is undoubtedly one of Asia's most exciting cities, and one of the world's largest, promising to reveal to each traveller the wild and untamed mysteries of the east. Khao San Road is one of the city's most vibrant streets, and is probably one of the best examples in the world of a backpacker's 'ghetto'. Day and night the short stretch of road is abuzz with activity. On the banks of the Chao Phraya visitors will find the Grand Palace as well as Wat Phra Kaew, the palace temple housing the Emerald Buddha, constructed entirely from translucent green jade. Slightly upriver are the exquisitely ornamented Royal Barges, still used today for special floating processions.

Of the 30 or so temples in Bangkok, the largest is the Temple of the Reclining Buddha, which houses an impressive statue of the deity. The famous Floating Market is a delight to visitors and well worth a visit. As the sun lurches towards the horizon in the west and the sweat cools, this city of royalty and religion comes alive with a palpable decadence. Music and dazzling neon advertise a plethora of trendy bars and nightclubs, as well as the notorious 'girlie joints' that have ensured the Patpong district its reputation for hedonism.

Though the city's frenetic pace and infamous congestion can be overwhelming, a holiday in Bangkok is a must for anyone travelling in Thailand.

ATTRACTIONS IN BANGKOK

Damnoen Saduak Floating Market



The Damnoen Saduak Floating Market is an escape from the Western-style shopping malls of Bangkok and a glimpse into the past, revealing the centuries-old way of life of the residents whose stilt-houses perch on the canals and make their living selling fruits, vegetables and flowers. Visitors can explore the market with boat trips and sample the wares of local farmers as they do so. They can also enjoy the experience of floating through one of Thailand's many river villages.

Royal Grand Palace



The Royal Grand Palace is a popular Bangkok attraction. Construction of the palace began in 1782 and was completed in time for the coronation of King Rama I, and opened in 1785 to signify the end of the Burmese invasion of Thailand. The palace itself is made up of a complex array of smaller buildings, most notably the Wat Mahatat (the Palace Temple) and the Wat Phra Keow (the Royal Chapel), which houses the famous Emerald Buddha sculpted from a single piece of jade, one of the most revered objects in Thailand.

Royal Barges National Museum



The Royal Barges National Museum houses several decorative royal barges, the earliest of which dates back to 1357. Most of the barges served as War Vessels at one point, and were subsequently used on royal or state occasions on the Chao Phraya River. Due to their age, the barges are now rarely used, but their intricate designs reflecting Thai religious beliefs and local history are of great importance to the country's heritage. The barges were last used at the end of 1999 to celebrate the king's 72nd birthday.

Temple of the Reclining Buddha (Wat Pho)

Situated adjacent to the Royal Grand Palace, Wat Pho is Bangkok's oldest, largest and most famous temple, recognised by the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme. The grounds of Wat Pho contain over 1,000 statues of Buddha, and the



temple houses one of Thailand's most spectacular sights, the Reclining Buddha: a 151-foot (46m) long and 49-foot (15m) high statue that is gold-plated and inlaid with Mother-of-Pearl on the soles of its feet. In the 19th century King Rama III turned Wat Pho into a centre of learning and it is considered the birthplace of the traditional Thai massage. Visitors today can still have a massage and learn about the ancient art of Thai Medicine.

Jim Thompson's House



American silk entrepreneur Jim Thompson deserves most of the credit for the current popularity of Thai silk around the world. Having travelled to Bangkok with the US Army in World War II, Thompson was struck by the beauty of Thai silk and began marketing it to US buyers in 1948, establishing the Thai Silk Company Limited. His fame increased when, in 1967, Thompson disappeared in the Cameron Highlands of Malaysia under mysterious circumstances. He has never been heard of since. The house itself is an excellent example of Thai residential architecture, and inside is a display of his Oriental art and antique collection, as well as an array of his personal belongings.

EVENTS IN BANGKOK

Songkran Festival - 2018-04-13

The traditional rites of Songkran involve dousing everyone around you in water as a symbol of cleansing and purification at the start of the Thai New Year. Songkran is celebrated nation-wide around Thailand with great gusto, and equally enthusiastically in the capital city, Bangkok. The fun-filled festival is held for about three days, centred on wats and temples where images of Buddha are bathed and the elderly in the community are symbolically washed by the youngsters. After the ceremonials, most people take to the baking hot streets for a merry, wet free-for-all. In Bangkok the best places to experience the festivities are on the square in front of the Grand Palace where the Phra Buddha Sihing is bathed; the Wisutkasat, where a Miss Songkran Beauty pageant is held; and Khao San Road in Banglampoo where jovial water-throwing reaches new heights in battles between locals and tourists.

Bangkok Marathon - 2017-02-05

The Bangkok Marathon is one of the toughest races in the world due to the heat and humidity the runners have to endure. No record times here unfortunately, but it still attracts plenty of serious runners. The race is divided into three categories: the 26 mile (42.195km) marathon, the 13 mile (21.10km) half marathon and the 6.5 mile (10.55km) quarter marathon.

Silom Soi 4 Halloween - 2015-10-31

There's nothing Thais love more than a good festival, and what better way to celebrate Halloween than with a street party in Bangkok's trendy pedestrianised bar strip, Silom Soi 4. Many of the bars, clubs and restaurants along this strip combine themed decorations with promotions, resulting in a great night out!

Chinese New Year - 2018-02-16

Bangkok boasts one of the world's largest Chinatowns and the best way to experience its cultural legacy is take part in its annual celebration. Each new lunar year, usually starting in February, the Chinese celebrate its arrival as tens of thousands tightly pack into Chinatown shoulder to shoulder. Seas of red clad people, worn to bring luck in the new year, drift with the current of the crowd between attractions. Papier-mâché lion dances, moon cakes, firecrackers and general merriment are all part of the fun but the biggest event is a visit from a royal family member which is to the great pride of the city's Chinese. A pickpocket's paradise, tourists should be careful.

CHIANG MAI

Chiang Mai is Thailand's second largest city, and an excellent starting point for excursions into the northern territories. Its name means 'new city', even though Chiang Mai is much older than Bangkok, having been built in 1296 under the rule of King Mengrai. The city straddles the gap between urban and rural Thailand, and offers the best of both worlds in terms of attractions and activities for Thailand tourists.

While Chiang Mai has more than 300 ancient temples, including the one at Doi Suthep, which offer breathtaking views over the area, its popularity is largely due to the elephant treks in the surrounding countryside. Travellers can also use Chiang Mai as a launching pad for excursions to the Lisu Hill-Tribe, Bhuing Palace, Isaan province, and Chiang Rai. Thai cookery classes are also a popular tradition, and the city also has an extensive night market, with dozens of street vendors selling a variety of traditional Thai wares that can be obtained at very low prices if you have the patience to bargain for them.

Chiang Mai is small enough to get around on a bicycle, has several attractions, and offers excellent accommodation, although tourists are advised that it can be difficult to find a room in peak season, between December and March.

ATTRACTIONS IN CHIANG MAI

Doi Suthep

Some 10 miles (15km) west of Chiang Mai lies the Doi Suthep Mountain, famous for the Wat Phrathat temple perched on



the summit. Legend has it that in the late 14th century King Ku Na was looking for somewhere to house a collection of holy relics. He placed them in a howdah (canopied seat) on the back of an elephant and let the animal wander. The elephant proceeded to climb Doi Suthep, on top of which it trumpeted, turned round three times and knelt to indicate that this was the spot. Within the site are bells, pagodas, statues and shrines influenced by both Buddhist and Hindu culture, including a model of the Emerald Buddha and a statue of the Hindu god Ganesh. Wat Phrathat can be reached either by a flight of about 300 steps, or by funicular, and offers breathtaking views of the countryside.

Mae Sa Waterfall



Set in the lush Doi Suthep-Pui National Park, only 10 miles (15km) out of town, the Mae Sa Waterfall is definitely worth visiting on any Thailand holiday. Follow the winding pathway to the waterfall's plummeting 10-tiered cascades. There are various little secluded areas along the trail where visitors can relax with a picnic. The jungle villages dotting the riverbanks are also fascinating to see. This popular picnic and swimming spot gets a bit over-crowded on weekends.

Chiang Mai Zoo



Boasting two giant pandas from China, *Chuang Chuang* and *Lin Hui*, Chiang Mai Zoo has earned itself quite a reputation with travellers as one of the top attractions in the region. The perfect destination for a day trip with the kids, the Chiang Mai Zoo also features exhibits such as a walk through aviary, Gibbon Island, an aquarium, a Cape Fur seal exhibit and even a special Children's Zoo. With two waterfalls, plenty of space to run around and a fabulous variety of exotic residents, a trip to the zoo is a must for all animal lovers and a great way to spend the day. Seal shows and other animal shows are conducted several times a day.

Pai



Located 83 miles (135km) up a coiled mountain road from Chiang Mai in the extreme northwest of Thailand, Pai is an unlikely tourist attraction. The town has undergone a number of transitions from hill tribe village to hippie hideaway to a tourist playground. Its relaxed atmosphere and peaceful mountain scenery have enlarged its widening reputation and it is now a tourist hot spot. Pai is a popular base camp for treks into the hills which can be arranged through hotels or travel agencies in the city. Closer waterfalls and hot springs are worth a visit, and elephant camps are nearby as well. An airport now connects Pai to Chiang Mai, but the best way to get there is by motorbike or bus in order to see the beautiful scenery on the way.

Chiang Mai Temples



Temple tours of Chiang Mai are a wonderful attraction for visitors. The old town is home to the most honoured temples and some tranquil Buddhist sanctuaries. The historic Wat Pra Singh holds the revered Phra Singh Buddha, which possibly dates from the 15th century. The oldest temple in Chiang Mai is Wat Chiang Man (established by King Mengrai), noted for its ancient bas reliefs and massive teak columns. Wat Chedi Luang boasts a gigantic chedi ruin, said to be the tallest structure in the old town, and was once home to the sacred Emerald Buddha (now in Bangkok).

EVENTS IN CHIANG MAI

Naga Fireball Festival - 2017-10-05

One of the world's most awesome phenomena is this natural event which coincides with the end of the Buddhist Rains Retreat. Hundreds, often thousands of balls of orange light rise out of the water to a few hundred metres before disappearing. It is not yet known how exactly this occurs and though scientists may dispute it, the locals believe it is the work of Naga, a serpent living in the Mekong River. There is an annual festival to celebrate this intriguing phenomenon.

Loy Krathong - 2017-11-03

Similar to Valentine's Day in the west, Loy Krathong is celebrated in Chiang Mai on the full moon night nearest November. Decorated banana leaf boats, beautifully lit with candles, float along the waterways. Hot air balloons made from colourful bags are also sent off into the night sky. Very romantic...

THE COAST

Lush, green forest vegetation extending down to limestone cliffs and pure white beaches lapped by warm, turquoise waters, the coast of Thailand is a tropical paradise with spectacular waterfalls and coconut palms bending towards the sun. The tranquillity and natural splendour of the Thai coast and its islands belongs in the realm of fantasy.

The East Coast stretches 300 miles (500km) down from the mouth of the Chao Phraya River to the Cambodian border, and plays host to the crowded beach resort city of Pattaya, as well as the idyllic splendour of the islands of Ko Chang and Ko Samet.

Along the eastern shores of the Kra isthmus lie the beaches of Cha'am and Hua Hin, once a favoured get-away for the royals and Thailand's oldest beach resort. Further down are the popular island resorts of Ko Samui and Ko Pha Ngan. West of the peninsula is the island of Phuket, which is the most popular beach destination in Thailand, offering beautiful sea vistas and spectacular accommodation, along with large crowds.

Among the dozens of islands in Thailand, there are resorts and destinations that cater for every kind of traveller, whether seeking a wild party or a quiet and relaxing holiday in Thailand.

PHUKET

In the Andaman Sea off Thailand's west coast, the holiday hub of Phuket, or the 'Pearl of the South' as it has become known, is connected to the mainland by the Sarasin Bridge. Thailand's largest island, Phuket is incredibly diverse with rocky and sandy beaches, tall cliffs, forests, waterfalls and temples.

Phuket caters to all, with a variety of holiday resorts offering accommodation from backpackers and simple guesthouses to modern luxury hotels, though the beachfront bungalows on unspoilt stretches of white sand are rarer now than they used to be. There are numerous activities in or near Phuket to enjoy on holiday, including mountain biking, bungee jumping and golf. It is even possible to go elephant trekking. A variety of tours offer day trips to the cliffs of nearby Phang Nga Bay, Koh Phi Phi, and the beaches and islands around Krabi. There is plenty to do on the island, whatever your budget, and several offshore islands are good for snorkelling and scuba diving.

Phuket has a huge variety of goods and shopping establishments, from markets and street stalls to department stores and specialist shops, and a range of restaurants from Thai seafood to Indian and Western cuisine. Phuket also has its own airport, making it easy to get to and from Bangkok, and although the island hosts thousands of tourists in peak season, its sheer size allows visitors to escape from the madding crowds. Patong Beach is the island's most famous and developed beach resort, offering a wide choice of holiday activities, dining options and nightlife. It is situated nine miles (15km) from Phuket City.

ATTRACTIONS IN PHUKET

Phuket Beaches



Few places in the world boast such an array of beautiful beaches with white sands and crystal clear waters as does Phuket. From the popular Patong Beach which daily draws hundreds of visitors to its shores, to the quieter Kata Noi hidden away from the crowds, Phuket has a strip of sand for everyone. For those who want to burn off some energy, activities such as parasailing, jet skiing and snorkeling can be found on many of the more popular beaches. The best beaches in Phuket for snorkeling would be Ao Sane and Paradise Beach. While for those who prefer to sit back and enjoy the atmosphere there are beachside massages, restaurants and cocktail bars around every corner of Phuket. In this regard, the best beaches in Phuket for relaxing, with a more secluded, hidden feeling would be Mai Khao, Had Sai or Freedom Beach. When the day is done, Phuket offers some of the most beautiful sunsets you will ever see, framed by sheer limestone cliffs and the lazy coconut palms which line the beaches.

Phang Nga Bay



The holiday spot of Phang Nga Bay is characterised by sheer limestone cliffs that jut vertically out of the emerald green water. The bay contains a fascinating collection of 3,500 islands, most of them uninhabited, which are unique in that they have central hollows or 'rooms', actually collapsed cave systems, containing hidden realms of unspoilt fauna and flora. Many of these can only be reached by inflatable kayak, which makes exploring the bay on the water an exciting way to enjoy the spectacular scenery. The largest and most popular Phang Nga Bay islands are James Bond Island and Koh Panniyi, the first named for having been where the movie *The Man with the Golden Gun* was filmed. Koh Panniyi or Sea Gypsy Island is where a village has been built on stilts in the water with a giant monolithic rock guarding its rear. Regular boat trips carry holiday tourists from Phuket to Phang Nga Bay, and it can be overcrowded during high season.

Thalang National Museum



The best place to learn more about Phuket's past and present is the Thalang National Museum, which chronicles the island's daily life as well as its long history. There are exhibits on tin mining, military history, the Sea Gypsy culture and artefacts of the ancient Sukothai kingdom, dating back to the 9th century. One of the most interesting exhibits is the Monument of the Two Heroines, sisters Thao Thep Krasatri and Thao Si Sunthorn, who helped to repel the Burmese invasion in the 18th century. *This museum is currently closed for renovation until April 2018.

Wat Chalong Buddhist Temple

Wat Chalong is the most famous of the 29 Buddhist temples in Phuket, welcoming thousands of visitors each year. The site is dedicated to two monks who used their knowledge of herbal medicine to assist in the tin miners' rebellion of 1876. The many buildings of the temple complex contain gilt statues, paintings, and relics, including a splinter of bone said to belong



to the Buddha. A unique aspect of Wat Chalong is the regular sound of firecrackers, which are set off to show gratitude for answered prayers. Visitors to Buddhist temples should take care not to wear revealing clothing (with knees and shoulders covered), and be prepared to leave their shoes at the door.

Similan Islands National Park



The Similan Islands have a reputation, even among the many Thai islands, as one of the world's top scuba diving sites. The intense blue waters are framed by white coral sand beaches, and are home to intricate coral reefs and rock formations. The most famous dive site in the Similan Islands is Richelieu Rock, where whale sharks are commonly spotted. The Similan archipelago consists of nine islands: Ko Bon, Ko Bayu, Ko Similan, Ko Payu, Ko Miang, Ko Payan, Ko Payang, and Ko Huyong. Not all are open to visitors, and all are virtually uninhabited. Many charters offer day trips to the Similan Islands from Phuket and Phang Nga, but there are limited accommodation opportunities as well. Note that the park is closed from May 1st to November 1st each year, and it is illegal to visit during this period; guests who do so put their lives at risk as there are no emergency support.

CHIANG RAI

Nestled into the lush mountains of northernmost Thailand, Chiang Rai surrounds its visitors in hill tribe culture and scenery. One of the most famous and exotic attractions in Thailand, Chiang Rai is home to the remote hill tribe communities that make up about 10 percent of Thailand's population. Scattered through the mountains and valleys of the province, the tribes are descendents of nomadic peoples from Tibet and southern China. Each tribe is unique, with its own colourful culture and traditions.

An 11-hour bus ride from Bangkok can leave many visitors looking to relax; fortunately they can, either by picking through hill tribe crafts in the Chiang Rai Night Bazaar, relaxing along the shore of the Mae Kok River or taking a look-out residence in the many hilltop guesthouses.

Many travellers arrive in Chiang Rai from Chiang Mai to begin their treks to hill tribe villages, but there is plenty to see and do in Chiang Rai itself, including visiting a number of beautiful temples and interesting museums. Chiang Rai has some good shopping opportunities, including several weekend markets, while good restaurants and food stalls offer a taste of northern Thai cuisine. The city also has a lively, if not endless, nightlife, with a few good bars and pubs hosting live music.

ATTRACTIONS IN CHIANG RAI

Hilltribe Museum and Education Centre



Chiang Rai's Hilltribe Museum and Education Centre is a great place to visit before heading on a trek to visit the hill-tribes in the region around Chiang Rai. The centre has several exhibits aimed to give visitors a better understanding of the culture and history of the tribes, but also gives an honest account of how the tribes are exploited by the Thai tourism industry. Tourists can also arrange hill-tribe tours from the centre. There is an excellent restaurant downstairs whose proceeds fund social programmes.

Doi Tung Royal Villa



High in the mountains of central Thailand, the Doi Tung Royal Villa was the residence of the late Princess Srinagarindra, also known as the Princess Mother. The Princess Mother built herself a summer residence in the area as part of her development project to discourage local farmers from growing opium and employing harmful 'slash and burn' practises. After her death, the residence was converted into a museum, and the rest of the property, including the Mae Fah Luang Garden and Mae Fah Luang Arboretum, is also open to the public. The complex has a hotel, restaurant, coffee shop and gift shop.

Chiang Rai Temples



Chiang Rai is home to a number of beautiful temples, including the Wat Phra Kaew, which was where the famous Emerald Buddha was discovered; Wat Phra That Doi Chom Thong, which houses a Holy Relic of Gautama Buddha; Wat Rong Khun (The White Temple), an ornate modern temple with large murals of the Lord Buddha; Baan Dam (the Black House), made up of nearly 40 small black structures made of wood, glass, concrete and terra cotta dating back to the days of Ayutthaya; and Munniti Chiang Rai, one of the only Taoist and Mahayana Buddhist temples in Thailand.

Visitors will need to conform to temple dress codes, which include modest dress that covers both the shoulders and the knees.

AIRPORTS

SUARNABHUMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (BKK)

LOCATION

The airport is situated 16 miles (25km) east of downtown Bangkok.

GETTING TO THE CITY

The Airport Rail Link (ARL) is the fastest way to get to central Bangkok. The service runs from the first floor of the airport and connects you to the MRT underground at Makkasan Station and the BTS Skytrain at Phaya Thai Station. Public buses run several routes from the Transport Centre to Bangkok, while the Airport Express provides air-conditioned coaches between the airport and first-class hotels in downtown Bangkok. There is also a Limousine Service counter on the 2nd floor of the Arrivals Hall.

TIME

GMT +7

CONTACTS

Tel: +66 (0)2 132 1888 or +66 (0)2 132 3888.

CAR RENTAL

Car hire is available from Avis, Budget, Hertz, Sixt and Thai Car Rental Association. Bookings can be made at the Car Rental service counter at Arrivals.

AIRPORT TAXIS

From the airport passengers can catch a taxi from the platform of the Passenger Terminal on the 1st Floor, Gates 4 and 7. Travel time depends greatly on traffic but is at least 30 minutes and can be much more. An exit fee is expected to be paid by the passenger although this can be paid at the end of the ride. Passengers can request the driver use the expressway which will cost a small additional fee.

FACILITIES

Currency exchange is available, and ATMs are located throughout the terminal building. Public telephones are widely available. A tourist information service is located in the Arrivals hall on Level 2, duty-free shopping and a myriad of restaurants, wine bars and fast food outlets are also available.

DEPARTURE TAX

WEBSITE

www.suvarnabhumiairport.com

SAMUI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (USM)

LOCATION

The airport is located on the island of Koh Samui, near Bo Pud Beach.

GETTING TO THE CITY

Shared minivans are available, charging fixed fares to destinations around Koh Samui. These are generally cheaper for solo travellers, charging fares from THB 60. Note that some destinations are not covered by shared transport, and are only reachable by private taxi.

TIME

Local time is GMT +7.

CONTACTS

CAR RENTAL

Car rental companies represented at the airport include Tipoa Car Hire, Avis and Sixt.

AIRPORT TAXIS

Private taxis are available at fixed rates to a number of locations in Koh Samui. Minivans are also available.

FACILITIES

The airport is small and attractive, and most facilities are outdoors. Airport facilities include cafes, restaurants, shopping and ATMs.

DEPARTURE TAX

WEBSITE

www.bangkokair.com/pages/view/samui-international-airport

KRABI AIRPORT (KBV)

LOCATION

The airport is located about nine miles (15km) east of Krabi city centre.

GETTING TO THE CITY

There is a bus service linking the airport to Krabi and Ao Nang. Buses leave about five times daily, but the schedule is adjustable depending on demand - buses leave once sufficiently full of passengers. Taxis and motorcycle taxis are generally also available outside the terminal; note that 'limousine taxi' usually just means an air-conditioned taxi. Fares have been standardised and must be pre-paid in the airport.

TIME

GMT +7

CONTACTS

CAR RENTAL

Car rental is possible at the airport.

FACILITIES

Facilities are fairly limited, but the airport provides the basics: souvenir and snack booths, a coffee shop, a restaurant, ATM machines, and a simple money exchanging facility are available.

DEPARTURE TAX

WEBSITE

www.krabaiairportonline.com

PHUKET INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (HKT)

LOCATION

The airport is situated 20 miles (32km) from Phuket city.

GETTING TO THE CITY

Many hotels also offer transport for arriving guests. Several companies provide limousine and minibus services at the airport to transport passengers to their required destination.

TIME

Local time is GMT +7.

CONTACTS

Tel: +66 (0)76 327 2307.

CAR RENTAL

Car rental companies represented at the airport include Avis, Budget and Sixt.

AIRPORT TAXIS

A taxi stand is located outside of the airport. Metered taxis have limited space for luggage; if travellers have large luggage and there are more than two passengers, they should consider a limousine taxi, which operates on a fixed fare, or minibus transfer.

TRANSFER BETWEEN TERMINALS

It is possible to reach the terminals on foot.

FACILITIES

Airport facilities include ATMs, shops (including duty-free shops), currency exchange services, an information counter, a sauna and spa, medical services, left luggage facilities, a restaurant and a bar.

DEPARTURE TAX

WEBSITE

www.phuketairportthai.com

SUKHOTHAI AIRPORT (THS)

LOCATION

The airport is located around 25 miles (40km) from Sukhothai.

GETTING TO THE CITY

Hotel shuttles and taxis are available from the airport to the city.

TIME

Local time is GMT +7.

CONTACTS

AIRPORT TAXIS

Taxis and shuttles are available from the airport to the city centre.

FACILITIES

Terminals are open-air and do not have air-conditioning.

DEPARTURE TAX

THAI PHRASEBOOK

English	Thai
Hello	Sa-wa-dee
Goodbye	Laa gon
Please	Ka-ru-naa
Thank you	Khawp khun
Yes	Chai
No	Mai
My name is...	Cheu...
How much is this?	Raa kaa tao-rai?
Where is...?	...yoo nai?
Does anyone speak English?	Mee kraï pood ang-grit dai mai?
I don't understand	Mai kao chai
One, two, three, four, five	Ne-ung, song, saam, see, haa
I need a doctor	Tong-gahn maw rahk-saa

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