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Thailand

Thailand is the most well-known and popular travel destination in Southeast Asia, and millions of tourists feel the destination's allure each year. The capital, Bangkok, is a thrilling first stop and is a favourite among budget travellers, who can spend their baht at its many street markets and affordable electronics shops, and infamous bars.

However, once travellers venture away from the bustling city, the natural splendour of Thailand really shines. The limestone karst rock formations and lush rainforests of Khao Sok National Park and other nature reserves are popular spots for jungle trekking, and the crystal-clear waters around the southern beach playgrounds such as Phuket, Koh Pha Ngan and Koh Phi Phi are a paradise for scuba diving and watersports. Many holidaymakers go north to Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai to see the beautiful temples and the famous Hill-Tribes, while the even more adventurous stray off the beaten path to Isaan, which is known for its vibrant festivals, bold flavours and untouched, rural landscape.

Thailand's unique culture is just as big an attraction however; hundreds of visually stunning Buddhist temples and shrines are scattered across cities and villages, and visitors can tour the ruins of ancient cities such as Ayutthaya to get a sense of the country's long history. No matter what part of the country travellers visit, a holiday in Thailand is an experience to be remembered for a lifetime.

Best time to visit Thailand

The weather in Thailand is divided into three seasons: the cool season (November to February), the hot season (March to May) and the rainy season (June to October). The cool season is usually considered the best time to visit, as it has the most sunshine and least rain, though the December holidays tend to be busy and the prices inflated, so the overall best months to visit in are November, January and February.

What to see in Thailand

-See the enormous golden statues at the Temple of the Reclining Buddha.

-Take in a Muay Thai match in Bangkok.

-Visit the many Buddhist temples in Chiang Mai.

-Tour the remains of Ayutthaya and Sukhothai, ancient seats of Siamese culture.

What to do in Thailand

-Ride a boat through the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market.

-Laze on the sunny beaches of Phuket.

-Indulge in the infamous nightlife of Bangkok.

-Take a hike to the Lisu Hill-Tribe.

Holiday resorts in Thailand

Thailand has many popular resorts for sun-seekers looking for the perfect beach holiday. Each resort has its own character, varying from lively nightlife to laidback seclusion, and from single's heaven to family-friendly perfection.

Getting to Thailand

Getting to Thailand is fairly easy. There are many cheap direct flights from the UK and US and even more cheap indirect flights. Nearly all flights to Thailand arrive at Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok.

Read

Four Reigns by Kukrit Pramoj and *Private Dancer* by Steven Leather.

Listen

Pumpuang Duangjan and Khruang Sai Orchestra.

Watch

The Beach (2000), *Brokedown Palace* (1999), *The Hangover 2* (2011), and *Anna and the King* (1999).

Drink

Satho (traditional rice wine).

Eat

Khao phat (Thai-style fried rice), and Pad Thai (traditional fried noodles).

What to buy

Thai silk, precious stones, affordable local clothing, and cheap electronics.

What to pack

A padlock for bags: leaving backpacks in hotel rooms and outside temples gives pickpockets a good opportunity to help themselves.

What's on in Thailand

The colourful Bor Sang Umbrella Festival celebrates traditional craftsmanship every January; Thailand celebrates New Year in April at Songkran. Floating candles and hot air balloons make Loy Krathong the most romantic day in November.

Did you know?

-Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that wasn't colonised by a Western power.

-The official ceremonial name of Bangkok is *Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahinthara Yuthaya Mahadilok Phop Noppharat Ratchathani Burirom Udomratchaniwet Mahasathan Amon Piman Awatan Sathit Sakkathattiya Witsanukam Prasit*.

-Popular energy drink Red Bull originated in Thailand and was originally called *Krating Daeng (*Red Gaur).

A final word

Exotic and enticing, a holiday in Thailand is an unforgettable experience that promises both stunning cultural sights and a bit of fun and relaxation.

Things to do in Thailand

Thailand's allure draws visitors back time and again. With its breathtaking coastline and tropical islands, the country is a haven of stunning beaches and a blissful, laid-back lifestyle.

Those who venture inland will find lush jungles, rolling hills and picturesque rice paddies that promise adventure and demand exploration. There will also be opportunities to, among other things, hike stunning trails, relax in natural hot springs and zipline over the forest canopy.

As a predominantly Buddhist country, Thailand is adorned with golden temples and exquisite architecture, though, to avoid temple fatigue, it's best to linger at a few key sites and truly soak in the experience. Bangkok, on the other hand, pulses with energy, offering neon lights and bustling streets that blend effortlessly with serene gardens and lively floating markets to create a delightful harmony of old and new.

One reason why Thailand is such a rewarding sightseeing destination is that it has retained its distinctive identity in the face of significant western influence. That makes visiting here an exciting and exotic experience, whether travellers are resort-loving beach bums or adrenaline junkies exploring hill tribes and river rapids. More good news is that Thailand is blessed with year-round temperate weather, so travellers can visit at any time, though in the months from June to October, rough sea conditions may make some islands unreachable via the ferry system.

Getting around is fairly easy and remarkably safe. An excellent bus network connects even far-flung towns with the major cities, while a comfortable sleeper train connects Chiang Mai in the far north with the capital Bangkok. Many people prefer to see the sights via organised tours and air-conditioned buses, but by doing so visitors risk missing out on the fun between attractions, where they will encounter local people in unexpected ways.

Thailand travel info

Electricity

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

Language

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

Money

The unit of currency is the baht (THB), and currency can be exchanged at the airport, hotels, bureaux de change and banks, which are open Monday to Friday. ATMs are available in most cities and tourist resorts, but there's a surcharge for each withdrawal. Most major credit cards are accepted at hotels and larger businesses and, although Apple Pay is not active in Thailand, Gpay can be used in larger establishments. However, cash is still king at most places in Thailand.

Tipping

Tipping is becoming more common in places frequented by tourists. If a service charge isn't included in a restaurant bill, customers should add 10 to 15 percent as a tip. Porters and hotel staff will expect a tip; taxi drivers generally won't.

Health

There's no risk of malaria in major tourist resorts or in the cities of Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Pattaya, Ko Samui, and Ko Phangan, but preventions against malaria are recommended in rural and forested areas that border Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos. Immunisation against hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid fever is also advised; yellow fever vaccination certificates are required for travellers from infected areas. Rabid dogs are fairly common, so travellers should consider rabies vaccination before visiting. It's best to avoid contact with stray dogs and monkeys, and to seek immediate medical attention if bitten.

There has been an increase in reported cases of dengue fever, particularly in the south, and Japanese encephalitis is a risk, though vaccination isn't normally recommended. Outbreaks of leptospirosis occur during the rainy season and after flooding. Travellers should drink bottled water and avoid ice in drinks, and seek immediate medical attention if they suffer from diarrhoea during their visit. The main risks of travel to Thailand include road traffic and other accidents, contaminated food and water, and sexually transmitted diseases. Medical facilities are good in major cities and popular tourist areas, but good medical insurance is strongly advised.

Safety

Though most visits to Thailand are trouble-free, tourists should avoid all political gatherings and marches, and stay well informed about the political situation in the country before and during their stay.

Like many parts of the world, South East Asia has been a victim of terrorism, so travellers should be vigilant in public places. They should also avoid the border regions and shouldn'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 Full Moon Parties on Ko Phan Ngan, travellers should 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

While Thais are well known for their friendliness, they frown on public displays of affection. Visitors must save their beachwear for the beach and respect the custom of taking off shoes when entering a home. Many shops and restaurants will also expect tourists to remove their footwear.

Foreigners should avoid putting their feet on tables or chairs, or pointing their foot toward anyone. The touching of others' hair or heads (rubbing a child's hair, for example) should also be avoided. Thais rarely shake hands, instead using the wai as a way to say hello, to apologise, or show respect. The wai is a prayer-like gesture, made with raised hands. Thais are generally calm and softly spoken people, and tourists should avoid arguing loudly or raising their voices, even when haggling in markets, as this is considered crude and disrespectful.

The Thai royal family is revered and any image of Buddha, large or small, is considered sacred. Partygoers should note that drugs are illegal throughout the country, and that the possession of small quantities can land them in prison.

Doing 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 their 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 and business people should become properly acquainted with their associates before they start negotiating.

The concept of 'face' and saving face is important so, if foreigners make a mistake, they shouldn't expect it to be pointed out to them, and if a local business associate makes a mistake, it's impolite to draw attention to it or correct them.

English is the language of business, 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. Pantsuits for women are quite rare.

Shaking hands isn't a popular form of greeting and the wai (putting a prayer-like gesture 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's 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, foreigners shouldn't open them in front of the giver. They should also wait to be introduced to others, as it's an indication of rank. Often the hierarchical structures favour the elders in a group and respect must be given accordingly.

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, and 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.

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). Travellers can purchase local prepaid SIM cards for unlocked phones, or use eSIMs if their cellular providers support it on their networks. WiFi is available in cities and holiday resorts.

Passport & Visa

Travellers entering Thailand must have sufficient funds to cover the length of their stay, and are recommended to hold documentation for return or onward travel. Visitors who are using the 30-day visa exemption must enter Thailand by air or land; it's highly recommended that passports are valid for six months beyond travel.

Entry requirements

US passports must be valid for six months beyond the date of arrival. No visa is required for tourist stays of up to 60 days.

UK passports must be valid for six months beyond the date of arrival and have at least one blank page. Travellers can visit Thailand for a period of 60 days for the purpose of tourism, business engagements and urgent or ad-hoc work. This visa category can be extended for another period not exceeding 30 days. Travellers can also apply in advance for a multiple-entry visa for up to 60 days.

Canadian Passports must be valid for six months beyond the date of arrival. Those travelling to Thailand for tourism with a regular Canadian passport can obtain a 60-day visa exemption on arrival (no visa required), which can be extended at the Immigration Office for another 30 days maximum at the discretion of the immigration officer. Travellers using a Multiple Entry Tourist Visa (METV) can enter Thailand multiple times during the 6-month period of validity, though each visit must be 60 days or less. The METV visa must be obtained before travelling.

Australian passports must be valid for six months beyond the date of arrival. Travellers can get a visa exemption for up to 60 days on arrival for tourism and short-term business travel. An extension of stay is possible for an additional 30 days.

South African passports must be valid for six months beyond the date of arrival. Travellers can get a visa exemption for up to 60 days on arrival for tourism and short-term business travel. An extension of stay is possible for an additional 30 days.

Irish passports must be valid for six months beyond the date of arrival. Travellers can get a visa exemption for up to 60 days on arrival for tourism and short-term business travel. An extension of stay is possible for an additional 30 days.

Passports from New Zealand must be valid for six months beyond the date of arrival. Travellers can get a visa exemption for up to 60 days on arrival for tourism and short-term business travel. An extension of stay is possible for an additional 30 days.

Useful contacts

Thailand Tourist Office: +66 2 250 5500 (Bangkok) or www.tourismthailand.org

191 (Police), 1155 (Tourist Police), 1669 (Ambulance).

Climate in Thailand

Thailand experiences high temperatures and levels of humidity throughout the year. The hottest months 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, and runs from November to February. Temperatures are fairly consistent throughout the year, especially in southern regions, and range between 74F (23C) and 86F (30C).

Disclaimer: By its very nature much of the information in this travel guide is subject to change at short notice and travellers are urged to verify information on which they're relying with the relevant authorities. We cannot accept any responsibility for any loss or inconvenience to any person as a result of information contained above.

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