

# Thailand

The name "Thailand", which was officially proclaimed in 1949, means "Land of the Free".

For so many people, Thailand is the ultimate holiday destination - and it's not hard to see why. This is a country with something for everyone. Sun-seekers can bliss out on achingly beautiful beaches and swim in the clearest turquoise seas, while shoppers get their retail fix in cool designer boutiques, have your suit & shirts tailor made and colourful local markets.

The kingdom of Thailand lies in the heart of Southeast Asia, making it a natural gateway to Indochina, Myanmar and Southern China. Its shape and geography divide into four natural regions : the mountains and forests of the North; the vast rice fields of the Central Plains; the semi-arid farm lands of the Northeast plateau; and the tropical islands and long coastline of the peninsula South.

The country comprises 76 provinces that are further divided into districts, sub-districts and villages. Bangkok is the capital city and centre of political, commercial, industrial and cultural activities. It is also the seat of Thailand's revered Royal Family, with His Majesty the King recognised as Head of State, Head of the Armed Forces, Upholder of the Buddhist religion and Upholder of all religions.

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy with His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, or King Rama IX, the ninth king of the Chakri Dynasty, the present king. The King has reigned for more than half a century, making him the longest reigning Thai monarch. Thailand embraces a rich diversity of cultures and traditions. With its proud history, tropical climate and renowned hospitality, the Kingdom is a never-ending source of fascination and pleasure for international visitors.

Thailand is blessed with natural beauty and its islands are amongst the most scenic and beautiful in the world. Likewise, its beaches are simply stunning - clean sand, clear water, and wonderful scenery. Each of Thailand's islands has its own character and identity drawing specific types of visitor.

## Topography

Thailand is divided into 4 natural regions:

- The mountainous North, with its profusion of multi-coloured orchids, fascinating native handicrafts and winter temperatures are sufficiently cool to permit cultivation of temperate fruits such as strawberries and peaches;
- The high Northeast Plateau, which still jealously guards its many archaeological and anthropological mysteries;
- The Central Plain, one of the world's most fertile rice and fruit-growing areas with colourful traditional culture and way of life as well as the sandy beaches of the East Coast and vibrant cosmopolitan Bangkok;
- The peninsular South where the unspoiled beaches and idyllic islands complement economically vital tin mining, rubber cultivation and fishing.

## Population

Thais are well-known for their friendliness and hospitality. A large majority of over 62 million citizens of Thailand are ethnic Thai, along with strong communities whose ethnic origins lie in China, India and elsewhere. About 7 million people reside in the capital city of Bangkok.

## People

Thai (80%), Chinese (10%), Malay (3%), and the rest are minorities (Mons, Khmers, hill tribes) Ethnic Thais form the majority, though the area has historically been a migratory crossroads, and has thus produced a degree of ethnic diversity. Integration is such, however, that culturally and socially there is enormous unity.

## Language

Spoken and written Thai is largely incomprehensible to the casual visitor. However, English is widely understood, particularly in Bangkok where it is almost the major commercial language. English and some European Languages are spoken in most hotels, shops and restaurants in major tourist destinations, and Thai-English road and street signs are found nationwide.