

Practical Information

Dresscode Nightclubs & Photo ID

Dress code: Long trousers and closed shoes for gentlemen. Shorts, ripped trousers, open shoes are not allowed. Apologies in advance for any inconvenience.

Photo ID: According to Thai Law you always have to carry an identification document (passport) with you, especially when you enter a club and it doesn't matter if you're young or older. For foreigners a photo copy will be accepted in almost all cases.

Etiquette

Buddhist, Chinese, and Muslim shrines or temples are open to foreigners, but since these are places of worship, please dress appropriately when visiting. Shorts and sleeveless shirts are discouraged and you should remove your shoes before entering. You may photograph monks (but women may not touch them), wats (temples), images (except the Emerald Buddha) and all Buddhist ceremonies. A non-Muslim can enter a mosque except during prayer time; some areas are off-limits to women. Ask first. Hilltribe houses have special spirit rooms which are closed to outsiders; entering them will violate their sanctity.

Thais regard the feet as unclean. Do not point them at others or step over those seated or lying on the floor. Remove your shoes before entering a Thai home and wai (palms together at chin level in an attitude of prayer) to greet the host. Thais are amenable to being photographed but if in doubt, ask first.

Banks

Banks in the major cities and resorts offer currency exchange counters that accept two dozen global currencies at rates set each day by the Bank of Thailand.

Best Time to Visit

Each season has its own special appeal. Most visitors prefer the cool months but even the monsoon has its charms—cooler, clearer air—and storms seldom last more than a few hours. Be warned: Christmas, New Year, and Chinese New Year (usually in January) are popular with travelers and hotels are generally packed.

Business hours

Business hours are from 8:00 a.m. or 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Some businesses are open Saturdays 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 a.m.. Government offices are open 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Banks open from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Mondays through Fridays. Money-changing kiosks open 8:30 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. daily. Post offices hours are 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Department stores are open 10:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. or 11:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m., seven days a week. Shops, restaurants, and pharmacies open at 8:30 a.m. or 9:00 a.m.; most close at 10:00 p.m. 7-Elevens are everywhere and are open 24 hours and seven days a week.

Climate

Thailand's tropical climate is hot and humid, but there are regional and seasonal temperature variations.

Bangkok enjoys three seasons: Hot (March to mid-June; 27-35 C i.e. 80-95 F), Rainy (June to October; 24-32 C i.e. 75-90 F), and Cool (Nov. to Feb; 18-32 C i.e. 65-90 F), although the humidity is considerably lower.

Chiang Mai in the far North is somewhat cooler with winter temperatures ranging between 13 and 28 C (56 and 83 F); in rare instances, temperatures in the hills can drop as low as 2 C (36 F). As in Bangkok, the heaviest rains fall in September and city streets often flood in October and early November.

In the South, temperatures on the island of Phuket can warm to 34 C. (92 F) in the hot season but the water temperature never drops below 20 C. (68 F). During the monsoon (May to late October) the undertow can be quite strong; look for red warning flags on the beaches. In all regions, nighttime temperatures are often only four degrees Celsius lower than daytime highs and the humidity often runs above 70%.

Clothing

Clothes should be light and loose; natural fibres or blends are best. Sunglasses are essential; light hats are advisable. Shorts are taboo for men and women at temples and mosques. Shoes must be removed upon entering temple buildings, so non-laced shoes (but not sandals without backstraps) are best.

Winter nights in the North can be chilly and a sweater will be welcome in the evenings and early mornings. Choose light clothes for Phuket's balmy weather. Many visitors save luggage space by buying inexpensive vacation clothes after arriving in Thailand, leaving them behind when they return home.

Credit Cards

American Express, Diner's Club, Mastercard, and Visa are widely accepted in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, and major up-country towns. Overseas credit cards can also be used in the ATMs operated by major Bangkok banks to obtain an equivalent amount in baht. In Bangkok, ATM machines are very easy to find.

Electricity

Electrical outlets are rated at 220 volts, 50 cycles, and accept flat-pronged plugs. Since many do not accept three-pronged grounded plugs, it is best to bring an adaptor or purchase one in a Thai department store.

Health Considerations

Although the chance of contracting them is virtually nil, polio, rabies, Japanese encephalitis, and typhoid fever vaccinations are recommended for a visit to Thailand. Persons arriving from a Yellow Fever area must carry a certificate attesting to recent inoculation.

Health Emergencies

At first-class hotels, doctors are on call for medical emergencies. For more serious cases, ambulances convey you to hospitals equal to those in major Western cities, with Intensive Care Units fully equipped to handle any emergency. Many doctors have been trained in Western hospitals but locally-trained doctors are also first-rate and usually speak English. In Bangkok, if you are injured in a crime-related incident, you can go to the Police Hospital at the Rajprasong intersection of Rama I and Rajdamri Roads.

Money Matters

The Thai baht is divided into 100 satangs. Paper currency includes a 1,000 (grey), 500 (purple), 100 (red), 50 (blue), and 20 (green) baht note. Ten-baht coins are brass disks in a silver ring, five-baht coins are silver with copper rims. Two-baht coins are silver and can be mistaken for five-baht coins; look carefully when being given change. One-baht coins are silver. The 50 and 25 satangs coins are brass. The baht is rated around 35 baht/US \$1.00. Newspapers list daily exchange rates. There is no currency black market. Most establishments accept credit cards and traveller cheques but not personal cheques. Money can be changed at banks, hotels, and several private money-changing shops whose rates are set by the government's Bank of Thailand. Rates in hotels are generally lower than in banks.

Newspapers

The Bangkok Post and The Nation are among the most comprehensive English-language dailies in Asia. The International Herald Tribune and Asian Wall Street Journal dailies as well as U.K., French, German, and Italian newspapers are available at hotel newsstands.

Language

Thai, the country's official language, is spoken by nearly all its people. English language fluency is limited to city residents; even fewer speak Asian or European languages. Hotel personnel speak English and travel agency guides are fluent in several languages.

Police Emergencies

In Bangkok, the police emergency number is 191. There are also Tourist Police assigned to assist travellers. Most Tourist Policemen speak English. Nationwide ring the TAT emergency hotline at 1155 for assistance.

Post Office and Communication

Post Offices provide mailing, packing, and shipping services. Long distance calls can be made through CAT (Communications Authority of Thailand) at the General Post Office on New Road or from the Telephone Organisation of Thailand's office on Ploenchit Road. Alternatively, one can purchase a Hatari or other phone card from convenience stores like 7-11 and place calls from ordinary public phones.

Most large hotels have telephones, telegrams, mail, telex, and FAX facilities. First-class hotel rooms have IDD phones and many have internet connections. Internet cafes abound throughout Thailand and many coffeeshops are wired for

wireless internet use. In Chiang Mai, the GPO on Charoenmuang Rd. (near the railway station) is open M-F, 8:30-8:00 p.m.. The Phuket GPO, at the intersection of Montri and Thalang Roads opens M-F, 8:30-12, 1-4:30; Sat, 8:30-12.

There are also Post and Communications Offices in each of the three terminals at Bangkok Airport offering long-distance, fax, and postal services for last-minute mailings; open 24 hours a day. These services are offered in the Domestic Terminal from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. The Post office at Chiang Mai Airport is open daily, 8:30-8:00 p.m., and in the Phuket Airport, 9:00-8:00 p.m. At Hat Yai Airport, it is open daily from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Public Holidays

These days are observed as official public holidays:

New Year's Day: January 1
Magha Puja: February full moon
Chakri Day (ascension of the present dynasty in 1782): April 6
Songkran: April 13
Labour Day: May 1
Coronation Day: May 5
Visakha Puja: May full moon
Asalaha Puja: July full moon
H.M. the Queen's Birthday: August 12
Chulalongkorn Day: October 23
H.M. the King's Birthday: December 5
Constitution Day: December 10
New Year's Eve: December 31

Chinese New Year in January (and sometimes February according to the lunar calendar) is not an official holiday, but many shops close for four days.

Television

Most major hotels offer cable television with CNN, BBC, and other English-language stations.

Thai Dates

The dates found on many old buildings accord to the birthdate of the Buddha in 543 B.C. To calculate the Roman date, subtract 543 from the Thai date i.e. B.E. 2477 - 543 = A.D. 1934.

Time

Thailand is +7 hours GMT. There is no daylight savings time.

Tourist Visas on Arrival

Passport holders of most countries (see www.mfa.go.th for complete list) get a tourist visas on arrival for 30 days. The applicant must produce an air or land ticket usable within 30 days of the date of entry.

Visas on Arrival generally cannot be extended except in special cases such as illness which prevents them from travelling, etc. Travellers that wish to stay longer than 30 days are advised to get a visa in from the consulate or embassy before travelling.

Visas

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs visa regulations stipulate these visa regulations and fees:

Transit Visa: 30-day, 800 Baht per entry

Tourist Visa: 60-day, 1,000 Baht per entry, exemption for 39 countries)

Non-Immigrant Visa: initially 90-day, 2,000 Baht for single entry and 5,000 Baht for multiple entries

Visa Extensions

Those who wish to stay longer or to change their visa status must file an application at the Office of Immigration Bureau on Soi Suan Plu, off South Sathorn Road, Bangkok 10120, Tel (662) 287-3101-10 (see also <http://www.police.go.th/thaiimb/frconten.htm>). The length of extension and status change is solely at the discretion of the Immigration officer.

Immigration Office Locations

In Bangkok, the Immigration Division is on the left, 500 metres down Soi Suan Plu of South Sathorn Road (Tel: 02 287-3101). The Chiang Mai office is 300 metres before the entrance to Chiang Mai Airport (Tel: 053 277-510 or 282-532). In Phuket, it is located at the eastern end of Phuket Road, on the right just before the traffic circle (Tel: 076 327-230). In Hat Yai, the office is on Petchkasem Road near the police station (Tel: 074 243-019).