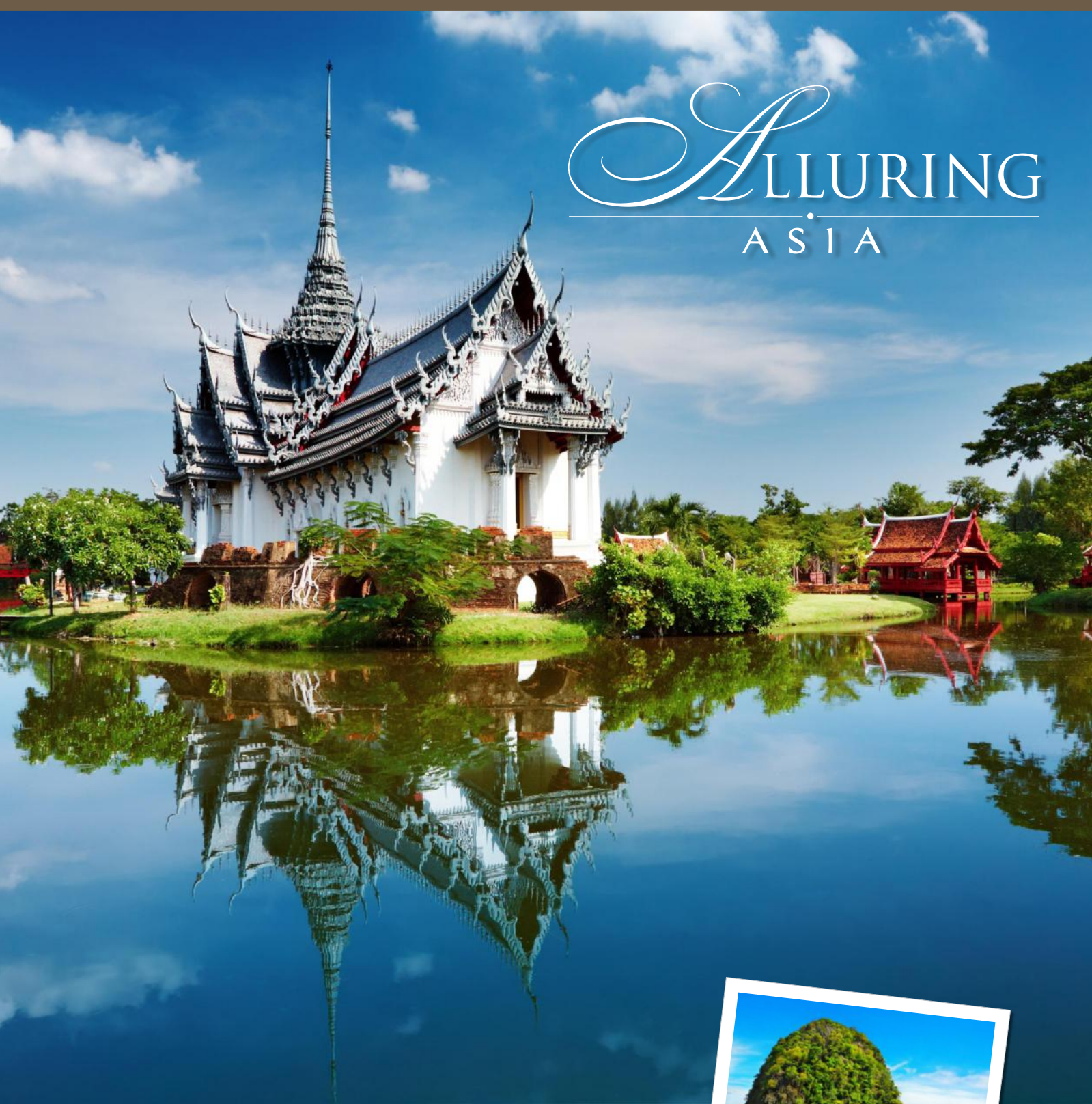


ALLURING ASIA



DESTINATION

THAILAND

TRAVELER'S GUIDE





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POPULATION

Thailand has a population of approximately 66 million with 12 million people living in the greater Bangkok area.

TIME

Thailand is GMT plus 7

VISAS

United States Citizens are allowed to stay in Thailand up to 30 days. Stays longer than 30 days require a visa. A visa is valid for a 60-day period from the date of issue.

INSURANCE

It is advisable to purchase in addition to normal medical insurance, to take out a policy which covers evacuation.

HISTORY

Thailand is a Southeast Asian, predominantly Buddhist kingdom almost equidistant between India and China. For centuries known by outsiders as Siam, Thailand has been something of a Southeast Asian migratory, cultural and religious crossroads.

Thailand has a rich historical background. Archaeological discoveries around the northeast hamlet of Ban Chiang suggest that the world's oldest Bronze Age was flourishing in Thailand some 5,600 years ago.

Successive waves of immigrants, including Mons, Khmers and Thais, gradually entered the land mass now known as Thailand, most slowly traveling along fertile river valleys from southern China. By the 11th and 12th centuries, Khmers ruled much of the area from Angkor. Thailand's earliest recorded inhabitants were Buddhist Mons who formed the loosely knit Dvaravati kingdom in the Chao Praya basin from the 6th to 11th centuries. From the 8th to 12th centuries, Hindu Khmers expanded westward from Kampuchea (Cambodia) and absorbed the Mons into their powerful empire. Mons today have largely disappeared in Thailand, although a sizable Mon community still exists in Myanmar. The Thai (Tai) people arrived later; two theories speculate as to their origins. Most believe they migrated from southern China during the 11th and 12th centuries and settled among the Khmers and Mons already residing in the central plains. Others argue that Neolithic cave settlements near Kanchanaburi and recent discoveries of a 6,000 year old Bronze culture at Ban Chiang prove that the Thais preceded the Mons and Khmers.

SUKHOTHAI PERIOD (1220-1378)

The brief but brilliant kingdom of Sukhothai marks the true beginning of the Thai nation and remains to this day a source of great pride. While Sukhothai's preeminence lasted less than 200 years, it gave rise to uniquely personified forms of architecture, sculpture, and even political structure. Under the leadership of King Ramkhamheng (1278-1318), revered today as the father of Thailand, Sukhothai fused Khmer and Mon traditions into a dynamic kingdom that ruled Southeast Asia from Laos to Malaysia. Military power and economic prosperity allowed the development of highly refined artistic achievements, including the world-renowned Sawankalok celadon and Buddha styles of great creativity and sensitivity. In 1238, two Thai chieftains rebelled against Khmer suzerainty and established the first truly independent Thai kingdom in Sukhothai (literally, 'Dawn of Happiness').



AYUTTHAYA PERIOD

(1378-1767)

Sukhothai's gradual decline was followed by the rise of Ayutthaya. Within a century of its founding by an ambitious Tai prince from U Thong, this riverine capital had become a major military power and the grandest city in Southeast Asia. Western visitors who arrived during the 16th and 17th centuries described Ayutthaya as a splendid metropolis with a population larger than London's. Among the farangs (foreigners) was Constantine Phaulkon, a Greek adventurer who rose to great power in the court of King Narai. After he attempted but failed to convert the king to Christianity, a palace rebellion broke out in which Phaulkon was executed and all Westerners expelled. It was during this period of self-imposed isolation that Ayutthaya created its own golden age of arts and architecture. This came to an end after the Burmese became jealous of their wealth and mounted a series of military campaigns against the city. In 1763 the Burmese attacked, and after two years of resistance they had slaughtered most of the population and burned the city to the ground. Not only did they destroy the artistic and literary heritage of Ayutthaya, they also pulled down many of the magnificent Buddhist temples and reliquaries - an act of horror which still profoundly shocks the Thais.

During Ayutthaya's 417 years as the capital, under the rule of 33 kings, the Thais brought their distinctive culture to full fruition, totally rid their lands of Khmer presence and fostered contact with Arabian, Indian, Chinese, Japanese and European powers.



BANGKOK PERIOD (1767-PRESENT)

The destruction of Ayutthaya was a devastating setback. But with typical Thai resilience, an ambitious half-Chinese soldier named Taksin rallied the nation and established a new capital in Thonburi, a sleepy fishing village just across the river from modern Bangkok. Within 10 years Taksin drove the Burmese from Thailand and expanded Siamese sovereignty from Chiang Mai to the deep south. As the son of a Chinese tax collector, Taksin repopulated the country with Teochew Chinese trade merchants, whose taxes provided significant revenue for the fledgling state. But the strain of long years of warfare took its toll, and Taksin apparently went insane with delusions of grandeur and paranoia. After imagining himself an incarnate Buddha, Taksin was executed in the manner prescribed for royalty; placed in a velvet sack and beaten to death with a sandalwood club.

Word of the coup d'etat eventually reached General Chakri, a popular Thai military leader on expedition in Cambodia. Chakri was called back to Thonburi and crowned King Rama I, first ruler of the dynasty which continues to the present day. Fearful of attack by Burmese forces, Rama I transferred his capital across the river to present-day Bangkok and attempted to recreate the former magnificence of Ayutthaya with the construction of royal temples and palaces. The city continued to be called Bangkok by Western map-makers, but Rama I renamed it a multi-syllabled Sanskrit moniker abbreviated as Krung Thep ("City of Angels"). Rama II (1809-1824), an outstanding poet, is chiefly remembered as the author of the Thai Ramayana. The British defeat of Burmese during the reign of Rama III (1824-1851) allowed the Thais to expand their national boundaries to Malaysia, Laos and Vietnam.

Today, Thailand is a constitutional monarchy. Since 1932, Thai kings including the present monarch, H.M. King Bhumipol Adulyadej have exercised their legislative powers through a national assembly, their executive powers through a cabinet headed by a prime minister, and their judicial powers through the law courts.

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GOVERNMENT

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral legislature consisting of a Senate appointed by the king and a National Assembly elected by the people. The National Assembly composed primarily of the liberal-leaning Chart Thai, Social Action, and Democrat parties, three political groups who often form coalitions to work with the military. Both chambers elect a prime minister who chooses a cabinet of 20 ministers. Thailand's leading political figure of the early 1980s was smiling Prem Tinsulanonda, a handsome enigma who confounded the critics by holding the job of prime minister for almost eight years - an amazing accomplishment when you consider that Thailand since 1932 has suffered through a dozen coups and 13 constitutions. Nineteen eighty-eight proved to be a watershed in Thai politics after public pressure for an elected leader brought the arrival of Chatichai Choonhavan, a business-minded politician who favors democracy over military rule. Chatichai fell from power in 1992 during a military coup in which dozens of citizens were murdered near Democracy Monument in Bangkok.

Thailand today appears to be moving toward a compromise government of military influence but civilian control. The emerging hierarchy seems to be comprised of freely elected democratic leaders who work with ex-military leaders, the government bureaucracy, and powerful Chinese businessmen who control the economy.

THE MONARCHY

Another stabilizing factor is the overwhelming prestige of the royal family. Although the monarchy was shorn of its powers half a century ago, the Thais continue to view their king as a near divine being who carries the real force of governmental power. The present ruler, Bhumipol Adulyadej, was born in 1927 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where his father was studying medicine at Harvard University. Not only amiable and intelligent, he is also a gifted painter and a talented jazz saxophonist who has led all-star jam sessions with such luminaries as band leader Les Brown and singer Patti Page. In what is now the longest rein of any Thai king, Bhumipol has earned immense popularity as the working monarch who guides and unifies the nation as head of state and protector of national traditions. Based on Thailand's laws of succession, Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn, the king's only son, will succeed his father to the throne, although his sister, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindorn, enjoys great popularity among the Thai people. Portraits of the king, queen, and royal family are seen everywhere in Thailand. All foreign visitors are expected to behave respectfully toward the royal family, an acceptable caveat since there is little doubt that the Thai monarchy has earned this honor.

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CLIMATE

Thailand has a tropical climate, with high temperatures and high humidity levels throughout the year. Temperatures in the capital, Bangkok, range between 68°F (20°C) in December, and 95°F (35°C) in April. January and February are normally dry, March to May is the hottest time of year, June to October tends to be the wettest season (with 90% of the country's rainfall occurring in this period), and November and December are the coolest months. Monsoons occur usually between June and October, and in September and October, much of the country experiences flooding, especially in the north, north eastern and central areas. Travel to Thailand is at its peak from November to February as this is when it tends to be coolest and most bearable for visitors.

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Average Temperature & Rainfall

Bangkok	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	0.7	1.3	1.5	2.7	7.8	5.7	6.5	7.4	11.2	10.1	1.8	0.3
Min Temp (F)	71	75	78	80	79	78	78	77	77	76	74	70
Max Temp (F)	90	92	93	96	94	92	91	91	90	90	90	89

Phuket	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	1.0	0.8	1.8	4.4	8.3	7.6	9.6	8.3	11.4	9.7	8.2	2.2
Min Temp (F)	76	76	77	78	77	77	77	77	76	76	76	76
Max Temp (F)	90	92	93	93	91	90	89	89	88	88	88	89

Chiang Mai	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	5.3	13.7	29.2	56.3	166	119.7	142	210	238	114	54	18
Min Temp (F)	58	60	67	72	74	75	75	74	74	71	66	60
Max Temp (F)	86	90	95	98	93	91	90	89	89	89	86	84

LANGUAGE

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

COMMON PHRASES

English

Hello
How are you?
Thank you
You're welcome
Goodbye
Please
I'm sorry
What is your name?
My name is _____
Yes
No
Where is the toilet?
How do I get to _____?
Water
How Much Is?

Thai

Sa-wat-dii
Sabaai-dii rue?
Khop khun (maak)
Mai pen rai
Laa kon
Karunaa
Kho thot
Khun chue aria?
Phom di-chan cheu _____
Chai
Mai chai
Hong nam yuu thi nai
Ja pai _____ yang rai?
Naam plao
Nii thao rai?

THE PEOPLE

The Thais are a remarkably friendly people, easy going. Their way of life is influenced by Buddhism, which teaches the merits of charitable and forgiving attitudes, humility and respect for others. Within this framework of behavior, the Thais place a good deal of emphasis on "sanuk" meaning fun or enjoyment. Surely there are few other people in the world who can have fun so spontaneously as the Thais. Perhaps the most famous of all Thai sayings is "mai pen rai" which translates as never mind or think nothing of it. This simple but attractive philosophy runs through every layer of Thai life. But for many, it is the flexible and adaptable nature of the Thais that makes them so endearing and the reason why so many visitors find it easy to strike up a good rapport in the Kingdom. Throughout her long history, Thailand has gently absorbed immigrants. Many were skilled as writers, painters, sculptors, dancers, musicians and architects and helped enrich indigenous culture. Thailand is one of the most racially homogeneous countries in Southeast Asia: about 82% of the country's 66 million inhabitants are Thai. This Mongoloid race largely

speaks a common language, shares a unified script, and follows the same Buddhist faith. As a racially tolerant people they have assimilated large numbers of Mons, Khmers, Chinese, and other smaller groups to a degree which precludes any typical Thai physiognomy or physique. Thais generally speak one of four dialects which are mutually intelligible with some degree of difficulty. Central Thai, the official dialect of government and business, has come to dominate over the northern dialect spoken in Chiang Mai and the northeastern dialect laced with Khmer loan-words. A southern dialect is spoken near the Malaysian border.

Thais on the whole are a delightful race of people who believe life is to be enjoyed so long as no one impinges on another's rights. Many decline to be fanatical about productivity or deadlines. Foreign visitors are often perplexed with their stubborn resistance to the Westerner's fast-paced, ulcer-prone life. This attitude is epitomized by the phrase mai pen rai (never mind).



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CHANGING MONEY

US Dollar traveler checks can be conveniently cashed at all provincial banks and authorized money changers. Traveler checks in other currencies are best changed in Bangkok where better rates prevail. Generally, hotel exchange rates are lower than those offered by banks and authorized money changers.

Major international credit cards, such as American Express, Diners, Carte Blanche, Master Card and Visa are accepted by major banks, restaurants, hotels and shops.

Thai and foreign banks provide standard services nationwide, Monday through Friday, except public and bank holidays, between 8:30AM and 3:30PM. Major banks such as Bangkok Bank, Thai Danu Bank, Thai Farmers Bank and Siam Commercial Bank operate currency exchange centers in most tourist areas from 7:00AM to 9:00PM, seven days a week, including holidays.

Many first-class hotels provide 24-hour money exchange services. Travelers Cheques are normally only accepted from the hotel guests.

TAXI

Anywhere in the world even a savvy traveler can be taken advantage of by a taxi driver and Thailand is no exception. To avoid problems it is wise to never accept a ride with anyone who does not have a working meter and a displayed license. One way to have a good Taxi experience is to ask your hotel where to find a legitimate taxi. You may be able to get a business card of a reputable taxi driver that you can either call when needed or arrange to pick you up at a predetermined time and place.



CURRENCY

The monetary unit of Thailand is the Thai Baht. The Baht is divided into 100 satang. "Copper" coins are valued at 25 and 50 satang. "Silver" coins are in denominations of 1, 2 and 5 Baht. A 10 Baht coin is composed of both "Silver" and "Copper". Banknotes are valued at 10 Baht (brown), 20 Baht (green), 50 Baht (blue), 100 Baht (red), 500 Baht (purple) and 1,000 Baht (khaki).

CREDIT CARDS

Credit cards are widely accepted in Thailand. Small restaurants, shops and bazaars may only accept local currency so we recommend you always have some cash on hand.

TIPPING

Service charges of 10% are added to bills in most leading hotels and restaurants. Where it is not included, a tip of 10-15% of the bill would be appropriate.

Airport porter/hotel bellboy:
\$1.00 - \$ 2.00 US per bag.

Your tour guide:
\$10.00 - \$ 12.00 US per person per day.

Driver/assistants:
\$ 6.00 - \$ 7.00 US per person per day.

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ETIQUETTE

Thais are very polite people. Handshaking is customary for both men and women upon introduction and smiling is definitely a national tradition. There are a few cultural pitfalls, mainly social and religious taboos, the breaking of which can cause offense. For example:

- 1). Thai's revere their Royal Family. Even social malcontents who ignore legal and community standards refuse to tolerate a faintly implied slight on the Thai monarchy.
- 2). Outward expression of anger is regarded as crude and boorish. The visitor who remains calm and smiles appreciatively will find all sorts of doors open to him.
- 3). Visitors should dress neatly in all religious shrines. They should never go shirtless, or in shorts, hot pants or other unsuitable attire.

4). Shoes should be removed when entering private Thai homes; chapels where Buddhist images are kept; and any of the Islamic community's mosques.

5). Each Buddha image, large or small, ruined or not, is regarded as being a sacred object. Never climb onto one to take a picture or do anything that might show lack of respect.

6). It is considered rude to point your foot at a person or object.

7). Thais regard the head as the highest part of the body, both literally and figuratively. Therefore, they do not appreciate anyone patting them there, even as a friendly gesture.

PHOTOGRAPHS

It is polite to ask permission before taking photographs, Some people may take offense.

COMMUNICATIONS

Telephone

Country code: 66. Public telephones are available in post offices, hotels and shops displaying a telephone unit sign and at roadside kiosks. To call Thailand from the USA/Canada dial 011 + 66 + Area Code + Phone Number.

Mobile Telephone

Roaming agreements exist with most major international mobile phone companies. Coverage is good in towns and cities throughout the country, with sporadic coverage in rural areas.

Internet

Internet is available in many areas of Thailand; there are Internet cafes in many main towns and cities and Internet access is commonplace in most major hotels throughout Thailand.

Post

Thailand's Postal service is state run but it is reliable and efficient. The postal service uses both railway and air mail. Most post offices have telephone and fax services and telegrams can be sent at any time of the day or night. Most provincial post offices sell do-it-yourself packing boxes and they provide tape and string at no charge. Hours of most major post offices are 8:00am-4:30pm.

Media

Thailand's media is well developed especially compared to other southeast Asian countries and has historically been relatively free, although the government has always exercised considerable control, especially over broadcast media. Newspapers and print media in Thailand are not subjected to close government supervision.

ELECTRICITY

220 Voltage, 50 cycles. A converter is necessary to pack



WHAT TO PACK

Dress is normally casual in Thailand and light clothing is advisable. Halter tops and shorts are frowned upon in most places except around sports and beach areas. When visiting a place of worship it is advisable for ladies to wear long sleeves and loose pants or long skirts.

Due to restricted weight limits on the Domestic flights (20kg or 44 pounds) it is recommended to travel light especially to the jungle areas.

HEALTH

No inoculations or vaccinations are required unless you are coming from or passing through contaminated areas. Yellow fever certificates are required for those who are coming from one of the 14 following countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Angola, Barkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Nigeria, Sudan and Zaire. Please check the latest regulations with your local Health Office.

DRUGS

In Thailand, the answer is simple - don't. Drug trafficking carries a mandatory death penalty. Under Thailand law all drug offenders are considered equal, and being a foreigner will not save you from the gallows.



SHOPPING

Thai silks, cottons, nielloware, silverware, bronze ware, pottery and celadon, pewter ware, precious stones and finished jewelry, and a dazzling range of folk handicrafts make memorable gifts and souvenirs. International standard ready-made sports and leisurewear are inexpensive and quality tailors and dressmakers offer reliable 24-hour services in Bangkok and major tourist destinations.

Shoppers in Bangkok have a wide choice of areas in which to pursue their search for bargains, most of them located within walking distance of the major hotels. There are air-conditioned shopping centers and a number of local markets selling an array of goods.

CUSTOMS

The following are prohibited items: All kinds of narcotics (hemp, opium, cocaine, morphine, and heroin), obscene literature, pictures or articles. A reasonable amount of clothing for personal use, toiletries, and musical instruments can be brought in free of duty. One still-camera or one movie camera can be brought in without duty. Five rolls of still-camera film or three rolls of 8 or 16 mm movie-camera film may be brought in free of duty. Cigarettes, cigars or smoking tobacco in total must not exceed 250 grams in weight and no more than 200 cigarettes. One liter of wine or spirits may be brought in duty free.

EXPORTS

Buddha images, Bodhisattva images or fragments thereof are forbidden to be taken out of Thailand. A license must be obtained from the Department of Fine Arts in order that such objects of antiquity or objects of art, irrespective of whether they are original or reproductions, may be taken out of the country.

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Words of Wisdom-Buyer Beware

Bring your purchases home with you. Unless you are prepared to wait a prolonged period of time, do not have it shipped -- not even by air freight.

Do not purchase expensive goods of supposed high quality unless you are absolutely sure of what you are buying.

Unless you are an expert in gems, antiques, artifacts, etc., you should not assume that it is of the highest quality or value.

Always take the time to read the charge slips for credit card purchases before you sign them. This may seem obvious; but in the excitement of making a foreign purchase, travelers sometimes overlook this and are unpleasantly surprised when they return home and are billed by the credit card company. Taking a few moments to review the charge slip before signing it (and computing the exchange rate to be sure you are charged the right amount) can save you headaches later.



FOOD

The main staple food of Thailand is rice - steamed, boiled or fried. Thai cuisine is distinctive, thanks to the liberal use of spicy ingredients, and combines the best of Chinese and Indian culinary traditions -- noodles, curries, sweet and sour dishes, lengthily cooked and fast-cooked ingredients, exotic spices and condiments - while retaining its own very special character.

Numerous restaurants offer every imaginable type of Asian cuisine and huge color pictures of dishes assist diners in their choices. Open-air garden restaurants, and riverine restaurants, are more peaceful and are favored in the evenings by most Bangkokians. Menus are extensive. All kinds of regional Thai food can be sampled. Special dinners can be enjoyed on boats cruising the Chao Phraya River. Seafood restaurants are also popular. They offer a wide choice of fresh ingredients, charcoal grilled or broiled to individual requests. Tropical fruits such as durian, ciku, mangosteen, rambutan, guavas, watermelons, papayas and bananas are available.



CULTURE & THE ARTS

THAI PERFORMING ARTS

The glory of Thai classic theater is the khon, a stunning spectacle of warriors, demons, and monkeys who perform acrobatics and highly stylized movements while wrapped in brilliant costumes. Khon has its roots in court-sponsored ballets which thrived under royal patronage until the military revolution of 1932 ended Thailand's absolute monarchy. Accompanied by the surrealistic sounds of the Thai pipat orchestra, the khon typically takes its storyline from either the Javanese Inao legend or the Indian Ramayana, called the Ramakien ("Glory of Rama") in Thailand. Actors and actresses never speak but rather mime narration provided by professional troubadours and choruses. Originally a masked drama, modern khon has unmasked heroes and celestial beings, through demons and monkeys continue to wear bizarre head coverings. Khon is also an endangered artform, the only remaining venue in Thailand being Bangkok's National Theater. Performances are sponsored several times yearly - a superb theatrical experience not to be missed.

LAKHON

While khon is male-oriented and relies on virtuosity in strength and muscular exertion, the courtly lakhon impresses its audience with feminine grace and elegant fluidity. Lakhon presents episodes from the Ramakien, Manora folktales of southern Thailand, and Lakhon Jatri, itinerant folk dances, used to exorcise evil spirits. Lakhon is traditionally accompanied by a chorus and lead singers instead of khon-style recitation, though these distinctions are no longer strictly followed. The costumes of elaborately embroidered cloth and glittering ornaments surpass the brilliance of even the khon. Unlike the khon, actresses are unencumbered by masks, allowing them to combine singing and dialogue with their dance postures. Highly refined body gestures display a complex encyclopedia of movements, while emotion is conveyed by the demure darting of the eyes and highly stylized, very specific movements of the hands. The dance itself lacks the dramatic leaps and whirling pirouettes of Western ballet- the feet are kept firmly planted on the stage - but a great deal of dramatic tension and sensuality are achieved by the movement of the upper torso..

LIKAY

If khon and lakhon are classical art, then likay is slapstick comedy performed for the masses. The obvious lack of deep artistic talent is made up for with unabashed exuberance and a strong sense of earthiness. As a form of people's theater performed at most provincial fairs, likay relies heavily on predictable plots, outrageous double entendres, and lowball comedy. Performers interact directly with the audience, which responds with raucous laughter at their political sarcasm and sexual innuendo. Costumes worn by the untalented but enthusiastic actors run from gaudy jewelry to heavy makeup. It is ironic that television, the universal destroyer of traditional theater, has helped keep likay alive with daily performances of soap-opera sophistication.

NANG YAI

This form of puppetry uses larger than life-sized leather puppets painted with vegetable dyes for daytime performances and left translucent for nighttime shows. Oxhide figures are manipulated in front of the screen by puppeteers and illuminated by candles that cast eerie colored shadows.

NANG TALUNG:

This variation, closely related to the wayang kulit of Indonesia, uses smaller and more maneuverable puppets. Still popular in southern Thailand where performances are occasionally given during temple festivals.



THAI PUPPETRY

A third type of court drama is the nang, or shadow play, which enjoyed great popularity during the reign of King Mongkut. Thai puppetry is occasionally performed in three versions at dinner dance shows.

HUN KRABOK:

This version, a vanished art, uses rod puppets similar to Chinese stick puppets. Puppets are still created by the famous Thai painter, Chakrabhand Posayahrit.

POPULAR DANCE FAWN LEP

Ladies from the north of Thailand perform classical movements while wearing long artificial fingernails.

RAM WONG:

A slow and graceful dance that cleverly fuses traditional lakhon hand movements with Western dance steps. Performed at most informal gatherings and very popular after a few shots of Mekong whiskey! Westerners who try the ram wong always appear incredibly clumsy, although their comical efforts are appreciated by the gracious Thais.

SWORD FIGHTING

Krabi Krabong - Originally devised by warriors to practice combat techniques, sword fighting is only performed today in conjunction with a dinner-dance show. A complete cycle begins with sharpened swords and then moves through combat with poles, knives, and finally hand-to-hand combat. Real swords give the fighters deadly potential in this skillful and exciting sport.

TRADITIONAL MUSIC

Backing up the khon, lakhon, and likay is the music of the pipat, Thailand's strange but captivating orchestra. Most westerners find the surrealistic flavor of Thai music difficult to appreciate, as it seems to lack harmony or melody. Traditional Thai music is based on a five-tone diatonic scale with neither major nor minor keys - more closely related to medieval Christian music or the abstract compositions of Ravel than conventional Western compositions. Similar to Javanese and Balinese gamelan, the Thai percussive orchestra is composed of five to 15 instruments such as drums, xylophones, gongs, metallophones, woodwinds, strings, and flutes. Musical passages indicate specific action and emotions (marching, weeping, anger). Thai music is abstract, highly syncopated, and emotionally charged.

ARTS AND CRAFTS

During 1976, Her Majesty Queen Sirikit established the Foundation for the Promotion of Supplementary Occupations and Related Techniques, popularly known as SUPPORT, with the object of giving rural Thais alternative sources of income and also of reviving some of the kingdom's traditional crafts. The result has been a variety of beautiful items available in Thailand through a chain of outlets called Chitrlada Shops.

Five Chitrlada Shops are located in Bangkok: on the ground floor of the Decorations Pavilion in the Grand Palace: in the Oriental Plaza shopping centre: in the shopping arcade of the Hilton International Bangkok Hotel: in the compound of Wimanmek Mansion: and at Don Muang International Airport. Others can be found at the Rose Garden in Nakhon Pathom province, in South Pattaya, and at the Chiang Mai Airport.

Among the SUPPORT products to be found in these shops are hand-woven silks from the Northeast, particularly in subtle ikat designs known in Thai as mat-mi; elegant yan liphao handbags, made from a vine that grows in southern Thailand and often adorned with gold fittings; jewelry in distinctive designs; supple Thai cotton in classic patterns; T-shirts with motifs designed by Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn; and numerous moderately-priced souvenirs.





RELIGION

CONTEMPORARY BUDDHISM IN THAILAND

Modern Buddhism is divided into the Theravade school adopted in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma and the Malayan version favored in China and Japan. Thais further subdivide Theravada into the less-rigorous Mahanikaya order, the majority cult, and the stricter Thammayut order followed by less than 10% of the population. Today in Thailand, it's not uncommon for monks to predict lottery outcomes, practice faith healing, distribute phallic symbols, sell magical charms, and charge hefty fees for ceremonial services.

Rebellion against conventional Buddhism is symbolized by Pra Bodhirak, an unorthodox but immensely popular and charismatic rebel who preached his iconoclastic viewpoints from the Santik Asoke (Peace, No Sorrow) headquarters on the eastern outskirts of Bangkok. Defrocked and under heavy legal pressures from the government, Bodhirak insists that Thai Buddhism has been badly corrupted by the decadent practices and superstitious beliefs mentioned above. His message of non-materialism and religious purity has hit home: popularity has soared and even the current governor of Bangkok supports Bodhirak's platforms of religious reform.

Theravada Buddhism is the professed religion of more than 90% of all Thais, and casts strong influences on daily life. Buddhism began in southern Nepal with the teachings of its founder, Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 B.C.), a wealthy aristocrat who rejected his princely upbringing after four alarming encounters with an aged man, a sick man, a corpse, and finally an ascetic. Shocked and disillusioned, Siddhartha renounced his royal life and began a 45-year quest for truth. After self-mortification and temptation failed, he solved the riddle of existence while mediating beneath the sacred Bo tree at Bodgaya, India.

Buddhism first appeared in Thailand during the 3rd Century B.C. at Nakhon Pathom, site of the world's tallest Buddhist monument, after the Indian Buddhist Emperor Asoka (267-227 B.C.) dispatched missionaries to Southeast Asia to propagate the newly established faith. Besides molding morality, providing social cohesion and offering spiritual succor, Buddhism provided incomparable artistic impetus. In common with medieval European cathedrals, Thailand's innumerable multi-roofed temples inspired major artistic creation.

Another reason for Buddhism's strength is that there are few Thai Buddhist families in which at least one male member has not studied the Buddha's teachings in a monastery. It has long been a custom for Buddhist males over twenty, once in their lifetimes, to be ordained for a period ranging from 5 days to 3 months. This usually occurs during the annual Rains Retreat, a 3-month period during the Rains Season when all monks forego travel and stay inside their monasteries.

Besides sustaining monastic communities, Thai temples have traditionally served other purposes -- as the village hostelry, village news, employment and information agency, a school, hospital, dispensary and community center -- to give them vital roles in Thai society.

The Thais have always subscribed to the ideal of religious freedom. Thus sizable minorities of Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs freely pursue their respective faiths.

SPIRIT PROPITIATION

Buddhism might be Thailand's dominant faith but it has never completely replaced older religious traditions such as Hinduism and spiritualism. Hindu ceremonies still play an important role in Thai society, largely because ceremonies for life passages such as births, deaths, and marriages were never prescribed by the Buddha, Brahmanic astrologers also prepare the national calendar and preside over annual rice-planting ceremonies.

But more important are the powers of astrology, the occult, and wandering supernatural spirits called phi, homeless and unhappy apparitions who can cause great harm to the living unless appeased with

frequent offerings. Phi are propitiated (not worshipped) for dozens of reasons; they are asked to influence the future, to grant wishes, to guarantee the success of a financial venture, to help one pass a school exam, to restore health to a sick family member, or to help a worshipper win the weekly lottery. Believed to exist in all shapes and sizes, some phi enjoy a permanent existence unbounded by the law of karma while others are reincarnations of dead human beings who have returned to haunt the living. People who died violently or whose funeral rites were improperly performed are especially dangerous, since witches can force them to consume the internal organs of the living. Others can make you remove your clothes in public! Although these practices are not in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha (karma teaches individual responsibility; spirit propitiation places responsibility on outside forces), phi homage doesn't necessarily conflict with the reverence that Thais feel for Buddhist philosophy. The average Thai is a Buddhist who has married according to Hindu rituals but makes frequent offerings to placate animist spirits.

SPIRIT HOUSES

One of the most powerful forms of phi are the guardian spirit called chao phi, of which the guardian spirit of the house (chao thi or pra phum in Khmer) is the most important. Thais believe that every plot of land harbors a spirit who must be provided with a small doll-like house. This curious spirit home, located on the exterior lawn where no shadow will ever fall, is furnished with a replica of the residing spirit holding a double-edged sword and a big book which lists deeds of the occupants. Other figurines include slaves, elephants, and sensuous dancing girls... to keep the ghost happy! After proper installation by a Brahman priest at the auspicious place and time, human occupants continue to make daily offerings of flowers, joss sticks, and food to placate the touchy spirit.

Thais also honor eight other household spirits including one troublesome fellow who resides in the door threshold. That's why it is proper behavior to step over rather than on the threshold. In recent years it has become popular to erect elaborate shrines dedicated to the four-faced Hindu god Lord Brahma. Thailand's most famous Brahmanic image is displayed at the Hyatt Grand Erawan Hotel shrine in Bangkok.

TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

Thailand has over 30,000 Buddhist temples, which share, to a large degree, common types of structures. The following descriptions will help sort through the dazzling yet bewildering buildings found throughout the country.

THE WAT

The entire religious complex is known as a wat. This term does not properly translate to "temple," since temple implies a singular place dedicated to the worship of a god, while wats are multiple buildings dedicated to the veneration - not worship- of the Buddha. Wats serve as religious institutions, schools, community meeting halls, hospitals, entertainment venues, and homes for the aged and abandoned. Some even serve as drug-rehabilitation centers.

MONKHOOD

To gain heavenly merit, improve their karma through correct living, and bring honor to their parents, many young Thai men elect to become monks for periods from a few days to several months. Initiates take vows of poverty and are allowed few possessions: three yellow robes, an alms bowl, and a strainer to filter any living creature from the water. Final daily meals are eaten before noon, while the remainder of the day is spent meditating and studying Buddhist scriptures. Although instructed to remain unemotional and detached about worldly concerns, many are surprisingly friendly to Westerners and quite anxious to practice their English. The Golden Mount in Bangkok is an excellent place to meet the monks.



BOT

Bots, the most important and sacred structure in the religious compound, are assembly halls where monks meet to perform ceremonies and ordinations, meditate, give sermons to lay people, and recite the patimokkha (disciplinary rules) every fortnight.

VIHARN

Secondary assembly halls where laymen pay homage to the principal Buddha image. Viharns are architecturally identical to bots except for the lack of consecrated boundary stones. Larger viharns are surrounded by magnificently decorated cloisters filled with rows of gilded Buddha images.

MONDOP

These are square, pyramidal-roofed structures that enshrine highly venerated objects such as palm-leaf Tripitakas (Buddhist bibles) or footprints of the Buddha. Thailand's most famous example is the mondop of the Temple of the Buddha's Footprint at Saraburi.

Wat titles often explain much about their history and function. Some are named after the kings who constructed them, such as Ayutthaya's Wat Pra Ram, named for King Ramatibodhi. Others use the word Rat, Raja or Racha to indicate that Thai royalty either constructed or restored the building. Others are named for their Buddha images, such as Wat Pra Keo in Bangkok, which holds the Keo or Emerald Buddha, Pra (also spelled Phra)- the term that often precedes important Buddha images - means "honorable". Thailand's most important wats are called Wat Mahathat, a term that indicates they hold a great (maha) relic (that) of Buddha. Wat Mahathats are found in Bangkok, Chiang Rai, Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Phitsanulok, Petchburi, Nakhon Si Thammarat, yasothon, and Chain Nat.

CHEDI

Chedi is the Thai term for the Indian stupa. In ancient times, these dome-shaped monuments held relics of Buddha such as pieces of bone or hairs. Later prototypes were erected over the remains of kings or saints, and today anybody with sufficient baht can have one constructed for their ashes. Chedis consist of a three-tiered base representing heaven, hell, and earth, and a bulbous stupa placed on top. The small pavilion (hamika) near the summit symbolizes the Buddha's seat of meditation. Above this is a multi-tiered and highly stylized umbrella ringed with moldings representing the 33 Buddhist heavens. The world's largest chedi is located in Nakhon Pathom, one hour west of Bangkok.

PRANG

These towering spires, some of the most distinctive and exciting monumental structures in Thailand, trace their architectural heritage back to the corner towers of Cambodian temples. Although these phallic-shaped structures are set on a square base-like the chedi, many have achieved a more elegant and slender outline than Kampuchean prototypes. Lower tiers are often ringed by a frieze of demons who appear to be - depending on your perspective - either dancing or supporting the tower.

PRASAT

These elegant little buildings have ground plans in the form of Greek Crosses. Prasats may serve either religious or royal functions. Those designed for secular or royal purposes are capped with familiar multiple rooflines; religious prasats are crowned with prangs. Thailand's most famous prasat is located at Bang Pa In, one hour north of Bangkok.



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ICONOGRAPHY OF THE BUDDHA IMAGE

Visitors to the National Museum and temples of Thailand are often confused by the variety of Buddhas they find. The following description will help sort out the basic symbolism and describe the delicate balancing act between religious symbolism and the artist's urge to create new forms. First-time visitors often consider Buddhist images monotonous look-alike crated with little imagination or originality, a not unfair judgment since Buddhist sculptors have traditionally been copyists who depicted Buddha images exactly as described in Pali religious texts.

The image's comprehensible and undisturbing symbolism is conveyed in dozens of ways: feet must be engraved with 108 auspicious signs; toes and fingers should be of equal length; hands should resemble the opening of lotus buds; arms should extend all the way to the knees; the magical spot between the eyes and protuberance from the forehead must represent enlightenment. Creativity was also stifled by the sculptor's desire to exactly reproduce earlier images that had demonstrated magical powers. According to legend, an authorized Buddha image carved during Sakyamuni's lifetime absorbed his magical potency; sculptors believed that exact likeness of the original would share these magical powers and provide the pious with supernatural protection.

Despite these religious straitjackets, Thai artists successfully created a half-dozen unique styles that stand today as some of Asia's most refined art.

MAGICAL MEDALLIONS

Thais believe protection against malevolent spirits, reckless phis, and black magic can be guaranteed with amulets, small talismanic icons worn around the neck or waist. Extraordinarily powerful amulets derive their magic from having been blessed by Buddhist monks or issued by powerful organizations such as the military or the monarchy. For example, those produced by the king and distributed to policemen have acquired considerable renown for their protective powers. Votive tablets found buried inside the relic chambers of ancient stupas are also deemed extra powerful. Amulet collection is big business here in Thailand; over a dozen publications are devoted exclusively to their histories and personal accounts of their powers.

Each profession favors a certain style: taxi drivers wear amulets to protect against accidents, thieves to protect against the police; American soldiers during the Vietnam War became fascinated with their miraculous powers. Color is also important: white amulets arouse feelings of love, green protects against ghosts and wild animals, yellow promotes successful business deals, red offers protection against criminals. But black is the most powerful color - it provides complete invincibility. Among the more bizarre amulets are those fashioned after the phallus (palad khik) and realistically carved from ware woods, ivory, or horn.

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