

Thailand



ชาติ ศาสนา พระมหากษัตริย์ (Chat, Satsana, Phra Mahakasat, ``Nation, Religion, King``)

- ✓ Thailand might almost have been designed with holidays in mind, so blessed is the country with attractions from bustling modern cities to golden tropical beaches. It's a famously friendly country; thanks to the renowned hospitality of the Thai people it's known as 'The Land of Smiles'.
- ✓ The capital city Bangkok is full of life. Roads are packed with cars and noisy tuk tuks, pavements are crammed with ramshackle food stalls and shrines are laden with fragrant flowers. North of Bangkok, Kanchanaburi offers a green getaway with mountains, rivers and WWII sites including the famous Bridge over the River Kwai. The crumbling wats and palaces at Ayutthaya, once the royal capital of The Siamese Kingdom, create an atmospheric insight into this once-magnificent city.
- ✓ The beach resorts of Phuket and Koh Samui offer world class hotels, luxury spas, upscale boutiques and high-end restaurants. Less-visited Krabi's coastline is dotted with limestone cliffs and pinnacles which rise steeply out of the turquoise sea, offering endless opportunities for snorkelling, diving and rock-climbing.
- ✓ In the north Chiang Mai is encircled by hills and displays its distinctive Lanna inheritance through architecture, cuisine and handicrafts. Chiang Mai, known as Thailand's cultural hub, is home to wood carvers, silk weavers and artists. Its quieter neighbour, Chiang Rai, is an excellent base for visiting ethnic minorities in remote villages. Not far away is the notorious Golden Triangle, the former centre of opium growing in this border area.



Capital
Bangkok



Population
68.86 million



Language
Thai



Time Zone
GMT +07:00
(Indochina Time Zone)



Electricity
220v, 50Hz.



Currency
Baht



When to Go

SEASONS

The best times to visit both parts of Thailand are typically between the months of November to February. The weather is characteristically cooler than other months and the country receives little to no rain making it an ideal time to travel.

Thailand's Central, Eastern, North and North Eastern provinces experience three distinct seasons: cool, hot, and wet; meanwhile the southern provinces and islands experience two distinct seasons: wet and dry.

WEATHER

The central and northern areas of the country generally experience a cool, hot and rainy season. During the cool season visitors can expect balmy tropical temperatures, and generally cool nights especially in the mountainous north and the flatter northeast. In February, and becoming more pronounced in March, the weather begins to change and this is generally known as Thailand's hot season which lasts until May. The hot season has little to no rain and can be quite uncomfortable for some because of the high temperatures. The rainy season lasts from June until October which is characterised by heavy afternoon rain showers. The mountainous regions of the north and the islands in the east of the country get more continuous rain showers than other areas.

The southern Provinces known for their beautiful islands and beaches have two general seasons which change between the east and the west. The rainy season, characterised primarily by heavy afternoon and night-time showers occurs in the western areas of Krabi and Phuket from April to October, while dryer months are from November to March. Meanwhile the rainy season in the gulf of Thailand around the beautiful tropical islands of Koh Samui and Koh Phangan occurs during September to December with dryer more pleasant months taking place from January to August.

WHAT TO BRING

As the country is in the tropics it is always wise to bring plenty of undergarments and socks. Trousers and a sweater are also highly recommended for air conditioned bus and air transfers. Walking shoes for temple viewing are also recommended and don't forget your shorts and sandals! Some temples will ask that you cover your shoulders and knees

ADDITIONAL REMARKS

If you can handle the heat another great time to visit is during Thailand's traditionally Theravada Buddhist New Year celebration which occurs during the hot season in April before the rainy season begins; the festival is characterised by humorous and playful water throwing. Additionally the rainy season can be nice in many parts of the country as it tends to rain for a short period in the afternoons and both crowds and prices are lower than the colder dryer months



Customs & Traditions

ART & ARCHITECTURE

Thai art and architecture was heavily influenced by the Indian Hindu and Thai Buddhist traditions. Thai temple mural paintings usually tell religious stories and statues of mythical celestial beings are often found in the temple grounds. Influences were also taken from their neighbours, in particular the Khmers, and Sukhothai has some beautiful examples of Khmer style temples. However Thai Buddhist architects developed their own styles of soaring rooftops and towering spires straining toward the sky. The most renowned example of Buddhist architecture can be seen at Wat Phra Kaeo (Temple of the Emerald Buddha) as almost every surface within the temple is covered with beautiful decorations and carvings. The most imposing example of modern Thai Buddhist architecture is the Bangkok's Wat Benchamabophit (the Marble Temple) which was built of carrara marble imported from Italy.

DANCE & THEATRE

Traditional Thai theatre consists of many different forms. The Khon masked drama draws its story line from the Ramakian and was originally performed only for the royal court. The graceful Lakhon dance can often be seen at shrines when dancers are hired to perform for the shrine deity. Likeh contains elements of pantomime, comic folk opera, and social satire and is generally performed against a simply painted backdrop during temple fairs.

Two other dramatic forms are the Nang Yai shadow plays and Hun marionettes where intricately fashioned figures are held against a back-lit white screen.

The Ram Muay is a Muay Thai boxing dance that precedes every Muay Thai match and is a way for Muay Thai boxers to show respect to their teachers.

ETIQUETTE

- In Thai culture it is unseemly to show too much emotion so avoid losing your temper over problems and delays.
- Monks are not allowed to touch women so do not hand anything to him or sit beside him.
- The traditional form of greeting is with hands together, prayer-like, but handshaking is done more frequently today.
- You should never touch anybody's head intentionally as it is regarded as a particularly holy part of the body.
- Accordingly, the feet are literally the lowest part of the body so do not point your feet at anybody or at a Buddha image.
- Always take your shoes off when entering a temple or when visiting private houses.
- In general, pointing with the index finger is considered rude, so call out their name or beckon with the whole hand.
- It is polite to ask permission before taking photographs.

PEOPLE

The Thai people, or Siamese, are the main ethnic group of Thailand and make up about 75% of the population; the remaining 11% are mostly Indian, Malay, Karen, Khmer, or Mon. One of the first things you will notice when you visit Thailand is the Thai people's inherent sense of fun, or sanuk. The famous Thai smile stems partly from this desire to make Sanuk.



RELIGION

Buddhism is the faith of 95 percent of the population, 4 percent are Muslim, and the remainder are Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and other religions. Religion plays a very important role in Thai life and is considered an essential pillar of society. Theravada or Hinayana Buddhism is the national religion of Thailand but there is total religious freedom. Temples can be found in virtually every village and they play an important role. Their prime function is to aid aspirants in their search for Nirvana, however they also serve as schools, hospitals, community centres, and as a place of safe deposit and refuge for the needy. At some point during their lives most Thai males will spend some time in a monastery.

