

Thailand

Understand & Survival (Chapter)

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Understand Thailand

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Thailand's economy has continued to boom despite the political uncertainty since the 2006 coup.

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Great ancient kingdoms, religions and dynasties have left their mark on how this nation has evolved.

THE PEOPLE & CULTURE 721

Despite its outward homogeneity, many subtle regional differences exist in the country, often influenced by Thailand's neighbours.

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For many visitors, the amazing food is one of the main reasons for choosing Thailand as a destination.

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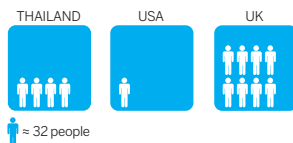
Since the Vietnam War, Thailand has gained a reputation as an international sex-tourism destination.

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Thailand's border contains lush rainforest, weathered peaks, inviting fish-filled seas and those glorious islands and white-sand beaches.



population per sq km



Thailand Today

Political Stability?

After a five-year period of political instability initiated by the 2006 coup d'état, Thailand has reached a political plateau with the 2011 general election. Ousted prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra's politically allied party, Puea Thai, won a clear majority of parliamentary seats, and his sister Yingluck Shinawatra, a political novice, was elected prime minister. She is Thailand's first female prime minister and this is the fifth straight electoral win for a Thaksin-backed political party. The people have clearly spoken and so far there has been no resistance from opposition groups or the military.

Prime minister Yingluck's first days in office set about fulfilling campaign promises, such as raising the national minimum wage to 300B per day (a 30% increase), extending symbolic olive branches to the monarchy and the military and pledging to work towards national reconciliation. Her appointments for the important cabinet-level positions of security and defence sidestepped hardliners in favour of two candidates who are believed to straddle the political/military divide.

The next question mark in Yingluck's administration is if or when she will issue a pardon for Thaksin to return from exile. Currently he is barred from politics until 2012 and is evading a two-year prison term. So far Thaksin has publicly stated that he has no plans to return to Thailand, though this statement was made from Japan where he appeared to be on a diplomatic appointment. During the campaign, Thaksin described his sister as his 'clone' and spoke of an indeterminate future when he would return to the country. According to an *Asia Time's* article (August 25, 2011), the government was described by a source as operating like a family business with Yingluck as the figurehead and Thaksin as the CEO.

Thailand's political protestors are divided into red and yellow colour-coded camps and they swap anti-government positions depending on which group holds the prime minister's chair.

Do & Don'ts

- » Do take off your shoes when entering a home or temple. Be careful where you put your feet (considered filthy in Thailand).
- » Don't criticise the monarchy.
- » Do smile: it puts Thais at ease.
- » Don't argue or get visibly angry; you'll cause embarrassment.
- » Stand respectfully for the national anthem (unless you're inside a home or building other than a theatre).
- » Dress modestly (cover to the elbows and ankles) for visits to temples or buildings associated with the monarchy.

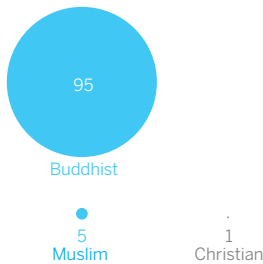
Top Films

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul; 2010) Winner of Cannes 2010 Palm d'Or.

Bangkok Traffic Love Story (Adisorn Tresirikasem; 2009) Romantic comedy with public-transit message.

belief systems

(% of population)



if Thailand were 100 people



75 would be Thai
14 would be Chinese
11 would be Other

Regardless of the division of power, Thais in general seem fatigued from the previous years' political distress, which undermines a deep-seated sense of a unified 'Thai-ness' and a cultural aversion to displays of violence and anger. Bangkokians, especially, are exhausted by the hassles of traffic jams and road closures that accommodate the seemingly endless exercise of freedom of assembly.

During the height of the 2010 crisis, the Western press was intrigued by the apparent class divide that defined the two political sides: the proletariat (pro-Thaksin) Red Shirts and the aristocratic (anti-Thaksin) Yellow Shirts. But Thai intellectuals feel this is an over-simplification of the situation and that the lines aren't as clearly drawn. In the middle of the extremes are the uncolour coded Thais who have sympathies with both sides. They might agree with the Red Shirts on the grounds of restoring democracy and disapproving of the military's and the court's meddling in politics, but they are sceptical of the Red Shirts' unquestioning loyalty to Thaksin.

For the political troubles in Thailand's south, see the boxed text, p596.

The Ageing King

Thais don't often discuss the topic openly but many are worried about their beloved monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX). Now in his mid-80s, he is the world's longest-serving king and is respected, and virtually worshipped, by his subjects. But as the king's health has declined, his role in society has diminished. He has been hospitalised for nearly two years and his public appearances are so rare that they make laudatory coverage in Thai national news.

In King Bhumibol's more active years, he was viewed as a stabilising force in times of political crisis. But he has not exercised that role during

- ✦ Population: 66.7 million
- ✦ GDP: \$580.3 billion
- ✦ GDP per capita: US\$8700
- ✦ Unemployment: 1.2%
- ✦ Education spending: 4.1% of GDP

Top Books

Agriarian Utopia (Uruphong Raksasad; 2009) The daily rhythms and financial struggles of farmers in northern Thailand.

White Buffalo (Shinoret Khamwadee; 2011) A man returns to his Isan village to find that all the local ladies love Western men.

Very Thai (Philip Cornwell-Smith) Colourful photos and essays on Thailand's quirks.

Chronicle of Thailand (William Warren) History of the last 50 years.

Thais who want to show that they love the king but don't want to claim a political identity now wear pink shirts as a neutral colour. On his most recent public appearance, the king himself also wore a pink shirt.

the most recent political troubles, which are partly due to the impending power vacuum that will result after his passing and the power-consolidating efforts of then-prime minister Thaksin. Beginning in 2006, the anti-Thaksin faction adopted the colour yellow, which is the colour associated with the king's birthday, to signal their allegiance with the political interests of the monarchy.

Losing the king will be a national tragedy: he has ruled for more than 60 years and defined through his life what many regarded as the modern Thai man (educated, family-oriented, philanthropic and even stylish). The heir apparent, his son the Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn, has assumed many of the royal duties his father previously performed but the ongoing political problems complicate a smooth transfer of crown from father to son.

Teflon Economy

From an economic perspective, you'd never know that Thailand is so politically divided. The former Asian tiger economy has moved into the new millennium as a Teflon economy: misfortune doesn't seem to stick. Outside forces – the global recession, a weakening US dollar – had some negative effects on the economy. In 2008 to 2009, manufacturing and exports, which constitute about half of GDP, took a dip but rebounded a year later with a growth rate that rivalled the boom times of the mid-1990s. With or without democracy, investors remain confident in the country, and tourism continues to grow despite the bloody Bangkok clashes in 2010. High growth is expected for 2011, meaning that unemployment remains relatively low and that Thais continue to experience stable and increasing standards of living. Modernisation marches on.



History & Politics

History

Thai history begins as a story of migrants heading into a frontier land claimed by distant empires for trade, forced labour and patronage. Eventually the nascent country develops its own powerful entities that unite feuding localities and begins to fuse a national identity around language, religion and monarchy. The kings resist colonisation from the expansionist Western powers on its border only to cede their absolute grip on the country when challenged from forces within. Since the transition to a constitutional monarchy in 1932, the military predominately rules the country with a few democratic hiccups in between.

Ancient History

Little evidence remains of the cultures that existed in Thailand before the middle of the 1st millennium AD. *Homo erectus* fossils in Thailand's northern province of Lampang date back at least 500,000 years, and the country's most important archaeological site is Ban Chiang, outside of Udon Thani, which provides evidence of one of the world's oldest agrarian societies. It is believed that Mekong River Valley and Khorat Plateau were inhabited as far back as 10,000 years ago by farmers and bronze-workers. Cave paintings in Pha Taem National Park near Ubon Ratchathani date back some 3000 years.

Early Empires

Starting in the 1st millennium, the "Tai" people, considered to be the ancestors of the contemporary Thais, began migrating in waves from southern China into present-day Southeast Asia. These immigrants spoke Tai-Kadai, said to be the most significant ethno-linguistic group in Southeast Asia. Some settled in the river valleys of modern-day Thailand while others chose parts of modern-day Laos and the Shan state of Myanmar.

TIMELINE

4000–2500 BC

Prehistoric people develop pottery, rice cultivation and bronze metallurgy in northeastern Thailand.

6th–11th centuries

Dvaravati establish city-states in central Thailand.

9–13th centuries

Angkor extends control across parts of Thailand.

Relief carvings at Angkor Wat depict Tai mercenaries serving in Khmer armies. The Khmer called them 'Syam'. The name was transliterated to 'Siam' by the English trader James Lancaster in 1592.

They settled in villages as farmers, hunters and traders and organised themselves into administrative units known as *mew-ang*, under the rule of a lord, that became the building block of the Tai state. Over time, the Tai expanded from the northern mountain valleys into the central plains and northeastern plateau, where there existed several important trading centres ruled by various indigenous and 'foreign' empires, including the Mon-Dvaravati, Khmer (Cambodia) and Srivijaya (Malay).

Dvaravati

The Mon dominated parts of Burma, western Thailand and into the central plains. In the 6th to 9th centuries, the Dvaravati culture emerged as a distinct Buddhist culture associated with the Mon people. Little is known about this period but it is believed that Nakhon Pathom might have been the centre, and that overland trade routes and trading outposts extended west to Burma, east to Cambodia, north to Chiang Mai and Laos, and towards the northeast, as evidenced by findings of distinctive Dvaravati Buddha images, temples and stone inscriptions in Mon language.

The Dvaravati was one of many Indian-influenced cultures that established themselves in Southeast Asia, but scholars single out the Dvaravati because of its artistic legacy and the trade routes that might have provided an early framework for what would become the core of the modern-day Thai state.

Khmer

While the Dvaravati are an historical mystery, the Khmers were Southeast Asia's equivalent of the Roman Empire. This kingdom became famous for its extravagant sculpture and architecture and had a profound effect on the art and religion of the region. Established in the 9th century, the Khmer kingdom built its capital in Angkor (modern-day Cambodia) and expanded westward across present-day central and northeastern Thailand. Administrative centres anchored by Angkor-style temples were built in Lopburi (then known as Lavo), Sukhothai and Phimai (near Nakhon Ratchasima) and linked by road to the capital.

The Khmer's large-scale construction projects were a symbol of imperial power in its frontier and examples of the day's most advanced technologies. Khmer elements – Hinduism, Brahmanism, Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism – mark this period in Thailand.

Srivijaya

While mainland Thailand was influenced by forces from the north and west, the Malay peninsula was economically and culturally fused to cultures further south. Between the 8th and 13th centuries, the Malay penin-

10th century

Arrival of Tai peoples in Thailand.

1240–1438

Approximate dates of Sukhothai kingdom.



» Ruins at Sukhothai Historical Park

sula was under the sway of the confederation of the Srivijaya which controlled maritime trade between the South China Sea and Indian Ocean. The Srivijaya capital is believed to have been in Palembang on Sumatra.

Of the series of Srivijaya city-states that grew to prominence along the Malay peninsula, Tambralinga established its capital near present-day Nakhon Si Thammarat and adopted Buddhism in the 13th century, while the states further south fell under the influence of Islam, creating a religious boundary which persists to this day. Remains of Srivijaya culture can be seen around Chaiya and Nakhon Si Thammarat. Many art forms of the Srivijaya kingdom, such as *nǎng dā-lung* (shadow play) and *lā-kon* (classical dance-drama), remain today.

Emerging Tai Kingdoms

In the 13th century, the regional empires started to decline and prosperous Tai city-states emerged with localised power and military might. The competing city-states were ultimately united into various kingdoms that began to establish a Thai identity. Scholars recognise Lanna, Sukhothai and Ayuthaya as the unifying kingdoms of the period.

Lanna

The Lanna kingdom, based in northern Thailand, dates its formation to the upper Mekong River town of Chiang Saen in the middle of the 12th century by King Mengrai, who settled the bickering between neighbouring towns by conquering them. He then migrated south to Chiang Mai (meaning 'new city') in 1292 to establish his capital. The king was a skilled diplomat and forged important alliances with potential rivals, such as King Ngam Muang of Phayao and King Ramkhamhaeng of Sukhothai; a bronze statue commemorating this confederation stands in Chiang Mai today. King Mengrai is also credited for successfully repulsing the Mongol invasions in the early 14th century.

The Lanna kingdom is also recognised for its royal patronage of the Sinhalese tradition of Theravada Buddhism that is now widely practised in Thailand and of the distinctive northern Thai culture that persists in the region. The Lanna kingdom didn't experience an extensive expansion period as it was plagued by dynastic intrigues and wars with rival powers.

Sukhothai

During the 13th century, several principalities in the central plains united and wrested control from the dying Khmer empire, making their new capital at Sukhothai (meaning 'Rising of Happiness'). Thais consider Sukhothai the first true Thai kingdom and the period is recognised as an artistic and cultural awakening.

Top History Reads

- ▶ *Thailand: A Short History* (2003) by David K Wyatt
- ▶ *A History of Thailand* (2009) by Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit
- ▶ *Chronicle of Thailand: Headlines Since 1946* (2010) by William Warren

1283

Early Thai script invented by King Ramkhamhaeng of Sukhothai.

1292

Chiang Mai becomes the capital of Lanna.

1351–1767

Reign of Ayuthaya.

1511

Portuguese found foreign mission in Ayuthaya, followed by other European nations.

Ancient Sites

- » Ayuthaya Historical Park
- » Sukhothai Historical Park
- » Chiang Saen Historical Park
- » Lopburi Khmer ruins
- » Nakhon Si Thammarat National Museum
- » Phimai Historical Park

The most revered of the Sukhothai kings was Ramkhamhaeng, who is credited for developing the modern Thai writing system, which is based on Indian, Mon and Khmer scripts. He also established Theravada Buddhism as the official religion.

In its prime, the Sukhothai kingdom extended as far as Nakhon Si Thammarat in the south, to the upper Mekong River Valley in Laos and to Bago (Pegu) in southern Burma. For a short time (1448–86), the Sukhothai capital was moved to Phitsanulok, but by that time another star was rising in Thailand, the kingdom of Ayuthaya.

Ayuthaya

In the mid-14th century, the Ayuthaya kingdom began to dominate Chao Phraya River basin during the twilight of the Khmer period. It survived for 416 years, defining itself as Siam's most important early kingdom with an expansive sphere of influence (including much of the former Khmer empire) and a fundamental role in organising the modern Thai state and social structure.

With a strategic island location formed by encircling rivers, Ayuthaya grew wealthy through international trade during the 17th century's age of commerce and fortified itself with superior Portuguese-supplied firearms and mercenaries. The river system connected to the Gulf of Thailand and to the hinterlands as well.

This is the period when Western traders 'discovered' Southeast Asia and Ayuthaya hosted many foreign settlements. Accounts by foreign visitors mention Ayuthaya's cosmopolitan markets and court. In 1690 Londoner Engelbert Campfer proclaimed, 'Among the Asian nations, the kingdom of Siam is the greatest'.

Ayuthaya adopted Khmer court customs, honorific language and ideas of kingship. The monarch styled himself as a Khmer *devaraja* (divine king) rather than Sukhothai's *dhammaraja* (righteous king); Ayuthaya

FRIENDS OF THE KING

In the 1680s many foreign emissaries were invited to Ayuthaya by King Narai, who was keen to acquire and consume foreign material, culture and ideas. His court placed orders for spyglasses, hourglasses, paper, walnut trees, cheese, wine and marble fountains. He joined the French Jesuits to observe the eclipse at his palace in Lopburi and received a gift of a globe from France's King Louis XIV.

In the 1680s, Narai recruited the services of the Greek adventurer Constantine Phaulkon, who was later accused of conspiring to overthrow the ailing king. Instead, the accusers led a coup and executed Constantine.

1688

King Narai dies and is followed by the Palace Revolution and the expulsion of the French.

1767

Ayuthaya is sacked by the Burmese.

1768

King Taksin establishes a new capital in Thonburi.

1782

Founding of the Chakri dynasty and Bangkok as the new capital.

continued to pay tribute to the Chinese emperor, who rewarded this ritualistic submission with generous gifts and commercial privileges.

The glories of Ayuthaya were interrupted by the expansionist Burmese. In 1569 the city had fallen to the great Burmese king, Bayinnaung, but regained independence under the leadership of King Naresuan. Then, in 1765, Burma's ambitious and newly established Kongbaung dynasty pushed eastward to eliminate Ayuthaya as a political and commercial rival. Burmese troops laid siege to the capital for a year before destroying it in 1767. The city was devastated, its buildings and people wiped out. The surrounding areas were deserted. So chilling was this historic sacking and razing of Ayuthaya that the perception of the Burmese as ruthless foes and aggressors still persists in the minds of many Thais to this day.

The Bangkok Era

With Ayuthaya in ruins, the line of succession of the kings was broken and chaos ensued. A former general, Taksin, claimed his right to rule, handily defeating potential rivals, and established his new capital in Thonburi, a settlement downriver from Ayuthaya with better access to trade. Consolidating his power, King Taksin, the son of a Chinese father and Thai mother, strongly promoted trade with China.

Towards the end of his 15 years on the throne, the king was deposed in 1782 by the military. One of the coup organisers, Chao Phraya Chakri assumed the throne as King Yot Fa (Rama I) and established the Chakri dynasty, which still rules today. The new monarch moved the capital across Chao Phraya River to modern-day Bangkok.

The first century of Bangkok rule focused on rebuilding what had been lost when Ayuthaya was sacked. Surviving knowledge and practices were preserved or incorporated into new laws, manuals of government practice, religious and historical texts and literature. At the same time, the new rulers transformed their defence activities into expansion by means of war, extending their influence in every direction. Destroying the capital cities of both Laos and Cambodia, Siam contained Burmese aggression and made a vassal of Chiang Mai. Defeated populations were resettled and played an important role in increasing the rice production of Siam, much of which was exported to China.

Unlike the Ayuthaya rulers who identified with the Hindu god Vishnu, the Chakri kings positioned themselves as defenders of Buddhism. They undertook compilations and Thai translations of essential Buddhist texts and constructed many royal temples.

In the meantime, a new social order and market economy was taking shape in the mid-19th century. Siam turned to the West for modern scientific and technological ideas and reforms in education, infrastructure and legal systems. One of the great modernisers, King Mongkut (Rama

King Naresuan is portrayed as a national hero and became a cult figure, especially worshipped by the Thai army. His story inspired a high-budget, blockbuster film trilogy, *King Naresuan*, by filmmaker Chatrichalerml Yukol, funded in part by the Thai government.

Landmarks of the Bangkok Era

- » Wat Arun
- » Wat Phra Kaew & Grand Palace
- » Dusit Palace Park

1851–68

Reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV) and a period of Western influence.

1855

Bowring Treaty concluded between Siam and Britain stimulating the Thai economy and granting extraterritorial rights to British subjects in Siam.

1868–1910

Reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) and increased European imperialism in neighbouring countries.

1874

Slavery is abolished.

IV) never expected to be king. Before his ascension he had spent 27 years in the monastery, founding the Thammayut sect based on the strict disciplines of the Mon monks. During his monastic career, he became proficient in Pali, Sanskrit, Latin and English and studied Western sciences.

During his reign (1851–68), Siam concluded treaties with Western powers that integrated the kingdom into the world market system, ceded royal monopolies and granted extraterritorial rights to British subjects.

Mongkut's son, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) was to take much greater steps in replacing the old political order with the model of the nation-state. He abolished slavery and the corvée system (state labour), which had lingered on ineffectively since the Ayuthaya period. Chulalongkorn's reign oversaw the creation of a salaried bureaucracy, a police force and a standing army. His reforms brought uniformity to the legal code, law courts and revenue offices. Siam's agricultural output was improved by advances in irrigation techniques and increasing peasant populations. Schools were established along European lines. Universal conscription and poll taxes made all men the king's men.

In 'civilising' his country, Chulalongkorn relied greatly on foreign advisers, mostly British. Within the royal court, much of the centuries-old protocol was abandoned and replaced by Western forms. The architecture and visual art of state, like the new throne halls, were designed by Italian artists.

Like his father, Chulalongkorn was regarded as a skilful diplomat and is credited for successfully playing European powers off one another to avoid colonisation. In exchange for independence, Thailand ceded territory to French Indochina (Laos in 1893, Cambodia in 1907) and British Burma (three Malayan states in 1909). In 1902, the former Pattani kingdom was ceded to the British, who were then in control of Malaysia, but control reverted back to Thailand five years later. (The Deep South region continues to consider itself an occupied land by the Thai central government – see p709.)

Siam was becoming a geographically defined country in a modern sense. By 1902, the country no longer called itself Siam but Prathet Thai (the country of the Thai) or Ratcha-anachak Thai (the kingdom of the Thai). By 1913, all those living within its borders were defined as 'Thai'.

Democracy vs Military

In 1932 a group of young military officers and bureaucrats calling themselves Khana Ratsadon (People's Party) mounted a successful, bloodless coup which marked the end of absolute monarchy and introduced a constitutional monarchy. The leaders of the group were inspired by the democratic ideology they had encountered during their studies in Europe.

In the years after the coup, rival factions (royalists, military, civilians) struggled for the upper hand in the new power regime. Even the People's

In 1868 King Mongkut (Rama IV) abolished a husband's right to sell his wife or her children without her permission. The older provision, it was said, treated the woman 'as if she were a water buffalo'.

1890

Siam's first railway connects Bangkok with Nakhon Ratchasima.

1893

French blockade Chao Phraya River over disputed Indochina territory, intensify threat of colonisation.



» Wat Arun on the Chao Phraya River, Bangkok

Party was not unified in its vision of a democratic Thailand and before general elections were held the military-wing of the party seized control of the government. The leader of the civilian wing of the People's Party, Pridi Phanomyong, a French-educated lawyer, was forced into exile in 1933 after introducing a socialist-leaning economic plan that angered the military generals. King Prajathipok (Rama VII) abdicated in 1935 and retired to Britain. Thailand's first popular election was held in 1937 for half of the seats in the People's Assembly, the newly instated legislative body. General Phibul Songkhram, one of the leaders of the military faction of the People's Party, became prime minister, a position he held from 1938 to 1944 and again from 1948 to 1957.

Phibul's regime coincided with WWII and was characterised by strong nationalistic tendencies centering on 'nation' and 'Thai-ness'. He collaborated with the Japanese and allowed them to use Thailand as a staging ground for its invasion of other Southeast Asian nations. By siding with the Japanese, the Phibul government was hoping to gain international leverage and reclaim historical territory lost during France's expansion of Indochina. Thailand intended to declare war on the US and Britain during WWII. But Seni Pramoj, the Thai ambassador in Washington and a member of Seri Thai (the Thai Liberation Movement), refused to deliver the formal declaration of war, thus saving Thailand from bearing the consequences of defeated-nation status. Phibul was forced to resign in 1944 and was tried for war crimes.

In an effort to suppress royalist sentiments, Ananda Mahidol, the nephew of the abdicated king, was crowned Rama VIII in 1935, though he was only 10 years old and spent much of his childhood studying abroad. After returning to Thailand, he was shot dead under mysterious circumstances in his bedroom in 1946. In the same year, his brother, His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadej (pronounced *phuumiphon adunyádèt*) was appointed as the ninth king of the Chakri dynasty, going on to become the longest-reigning king in Thai history, as well as the world's longest-reigning, living monarch.

For a brief period after the war, democracy flourished: full elections for the people's assembly were held and the 1946 constitution sought to reduce the role of the military and provide more democratic rights. And it all lasted until the death of King Ananda, the pretext the military used to return to power with Phibul at the helm.

Military Dictatorships

In 1957 Phibul's successor General Sarit Thanarat subjected the country to a true military dictatorship: abolishing the constitution, dissolving the parliament and banning all political parties. In the 1950s, the US directly involved itself in Southeast Asia, attempting to contain communist

Phibul Songkhram changed the name of the country in 1939 from 'Siam' to 'Prathet Thai' (or 'Thailand' in English); it was considered an overt nationalistic gesture intended to unite all the Tai-speaking people.

PRATHET
THAI

1902

Siam annexes Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat from the former sultanate of Pattani.

1909

Anglo-Siamese Treaty outlines Siam's boundaries.

1913

King Vajiravudh requires all citizens to adopt surnames.

1916

The first Thai university, Chulalongkorn University, is established.

Thailand has had 17 constitutions, all rewritten as a result of 18 (this number is debatable) coups. Each reincarnation seeks to allocate power within the branches of government with a bias for the ruling interest (military, royalist or civilian) and against their political foes.

expansion in the region. In the context of the Cold War, the US government gave economic and military support to the Sarit government and continued that relationship with subsequent military dictators, Thanom Kittikachorn and Praphat Charusathien, who controlled the country from 1964 to 1973. They negotiated a package of economic deals with the USA in exchange for allowing the development of US military bases in Thailand to support the war in Vietnam.

By 1973, an opposition group of left-wing activists, mainly intellectuals and students, along with peasants, workers and portions of the middle class, organised political rallies demanding a constitution from the military government. On 14 October that year the military brutally suppressed a large demonstration in Bangkok, killing 77 people and wounding more than 800. The event is commemorated by a monument on Th Ratchadamnoen Klang in Bangkok, near the Democracy Monument. King Bhumibol stepped in and refused to support further bloodshed, forcing Thanom and Praphat to leave Thailand.

In the following years, the left-oriented student movement grew more radical, creating fears among working-class and middle-class Thais of home-grown communism. In 1976 Thanom returned to Thailand (ostensibly to become a monk) and was received warmly by the royal family. In response, protestors organised demonstrations at Thammasat University against the perceived perpetrator of the 14 October massacre. Right-wing, anti-communist civilian groups clashed with the students, resulting in bloody violence. In the aftermath, many students and intellectuals were forced underground, and joined armed communist insurgents –

LIBERAL COUNTERWEIGHT

Pridi Phanomyong (1900–83) was a French-educated lawyer and a civilian leader in the 1932 revolution and People's Party. His work on democratic reforms in Thailand was based on constitutional measures and attempts to restrict by law military involvement in Thai politics. He supported nationalisation of land and labour, state-led industrialisation and labour protection. In 1934, he founded Thammasat University. He also served as the figurehead of Seri Thai (the resistance movement against WWII Japanese occupation of Thailand) and was Thai prime minister (1946).

Though acknowledged as a senior statesman, Pridi Phanomyong was a controversial figure and a major foe of Phibun and the military regimes. He was accused of being a communist by his critics and forced out of the country under suspicion of regicide. Since the thawing of the Cold War, his legacy has been re-examined and recognised its democratic efforts and the counterbalancing effects it had on military interests. He was named one of Unesco's great personalities of the 20th-century world in 2000.

1917

Siam sends troops to join the Allies in WWI.

1932

Bloodless coup ends absolute monarchy.

1939

The country's English name is officially changed from Siam to Thailand.

1941

Japanese forces enter Thailand during WWII.

known as the People's Liberation Army of Thailand (PLAT) – based in the jungles of northern and southern Thailand.

Military control of the country continued through the 1980s. The government of the 'political soldier', General Prem Tinsulanonda, enjoyed a period of political and economic stability. Prem dismantled the communist insurgency through military action and amnesty programs. But the country's new economic success presented a challenging rival: prominent business leaders who criticised the military's role in government and their now-dated Cold War mentality. Communists, they maintained, should be business partners, not enemies.

It's Just Business

In 1988, Prem was replaced in fair elections by Chatichai Choonhavan, leader of the Chat Thai Party, who created a government dominated by well-connected provincial business people. His government shifted power away from the bureaucrats and set about transforming Thailand into an 'Asian Tiger' economy. But the business of politics was often bought and sold like a commodity and Chatichai was overthrown by the military on grounds of extreme corruption. This coup demarcated an emerging trend in Thai politics: the Bangkok business community and educated classes siding with the military against Chatichai, his provincial business-politicians and their money politics approach to governance.

In 1992, after reinstating elections, an unelected military leader inserted himself as prime minister. This was met with popular resistance and the ensuing civilian-military clash was dubbed 'Black May'. Led by former Bangkok mayor, Chamlong Srimuang, around 200,000 protestors (called the 'mobile phone mob', representing their rising urban affluence) launched a mass demonstration in Bangkok that resulted in three nights of violence with armed soldiers. On the night of 20 May, King Bhumibol called an end to the violence.

After Black May, a new wave of democracy activists advocated for constitutional reforms. For most of the 1990s, the parliament was dominated by the Democrat Party, which represented the urban middle class and business interests. Its major base of support came from the southern Thai population centres. Formerly port towns, these were now dominated by tourism and exports (rubber, tin and fishing). On the other side of the spectrum were the former pro-military politicians based in the central plains and the people of the agrarian northeast in new provincial towns who focused on state-budget distribution to their provinces. These political lines exist today.

In 1997, the boom years went bust and the Asian economic crisis unfolded. The country's economy was plagued by foreign-debt burdens, an overextension in the real-estate sector and a devalued currency. Within

Prem Tinsulanonda serves as lifelong head of the Privy Council of King Bhumibol and is believed to be the architect of the 2006 coup.

1945

WWII ends; Thailand cedes seized territory from Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia.

1946

King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX) ascends the throne; Thailand joins the UN.

1957

Sarit Thanarat leads a coup that introduces military rule that lasts until 1973.

1959

The first tourist authority created.

months of the crisis, the Thai currency plunged from 25B to 56B per US\$1. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) stepped in to impose financial and legal reforms and economic liberalisation programs in exchange for more than US\$17 billion to stabilise the Thai currency.

In the aftermath of the crisis, the Democrats returned to power uncontested, but were viewed as ineffective as the economy worsened.

Thaksinocracy

In 2000, the economic slump began to ease and business interests eclipsed the military as the dominant political force. The telecommunications billionaire and former police officer, Thaksin Shinawatra, through his Thai Rak Thai (TRT or 'Thai Loving Thai') party, capitalised on the rising nationalism and won a majority in the elections of 2001. Self-styled as a CEO-politician, Thaksin swiftly delivered on his campaign promises for rural development, including agrarian debt relief, village capital funds and cheap health care.

Thanks to the 1997 constitutional reforms designed to strengthen the prime minister's position, his was one of Thai history's most stable elected governments. The surging economy and his bold, if strong-arm, leadership won an outright majority in 2005, effectively introducing one-party rule. His popularity among the working class and rural voters was immense.

In 2006 Thaksin was accused of abusing his powers and of conflicts of interest, most notably in his family's sale of their Shin Corporation to the Singaporean government for 73 billion baht (US\$1.88 billion), a tax-free gain thanks to telecommunications legislation that he had helped craft. Demonstrations in Bangkok called for his ousting and on 19 September 2006, the military staged a bloodless coup that forced Thaksin into exile. The TRT Party was dissolved by court order and party executives were barred from politics for five years. As promised, the interim government held general elections in December, returning the country to civilian rule, but the outcome was unsatisfactory to the military and the Bangkok upper- and middle-classes when Thaksin's political allies won a majority and formed a government led by Samak Sundaravej.

Demonstrations against the Thaksin-aligned government were led by Chamlong Srimuang (Black May activist and former Bangkok governor) and Sondhi Limthongkul (a long-time business and political rival of Thaksin's). Their group, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), earned the nickname 'Yellow Shirts' because they wore yellow (the king's birthday colour) to express their royalist allegiances; it was believed that Thaksin was so successfully consolidating power during his tenure that he had designs on the throne or at least in interrupting royal succession.

Without the job of being absolute, King Bhumibol had to find new work so he started the Royal Project Foundation in 1969 to help struggling farmers. The foundation's most lauded effort was eradication of opium cultivation among the northern hill tribes.

1965

Thailand hosts US military bases during the Vietnam War.

1968

Thailand is a founding member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

1973

Thai students, workers and farmers demonstrate for the reinstatement of a democratic government.

1976

Violent suppression of student movement by the military.

Thaksin was the first prime minister in Thai history to complete a four-year term of office.

In September 2008, Samak Sundaravej was unseated by the Constitutional Court on a technicality: while in office, he hosted a TV cooking show that the court found to be a conflict of interest. Still not politically satisfied, the Yellow Shirts seized control of Thailand's main airports, Suvarnabhumi and Don Muang, for a week in November 2008 until the military manoeuvred a silent coup and another favourable court ruling that further weakened Thaksin's political proxies. Through last-minute coalition building, Democrat Abhisit Vejjajiva was elected in a parliamentary vote, becoming Thailand's 27th prime minister.

Thaksin supporters organised their own counter-movement as the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship, better known as the 'Red Shirts'. Supporters hail mostly from the north and northeast, and include anti-coup, pro-democracy activists as well as die-hard Thaksin fans. There is a degree of class struggle, with some Red Shirts expressing bombastic animosity towards the aristocrats. The Red Shirts' most provocative demonstration came in 2010 after Thailand's Supreme Court ordered the seizure of US\$46 billion of Thaksin's assets after finding him guilty of abusing his powers as prime minister. Red Shirts occupied Bangkok's central shopping district for two months and demanded the dissolution of the government and reinstatement of elections. Protest leaders and the government were unable to reach a compromise and in May 2010 the military used force to evict the protestors, resulting in bloody clashes where 91 people were killed and a smouldering central city (US\$1.5 billion of crackdown-related arson damage was estimated).

In 2011, general elections were held and Thaksin's politically allied Puea Thai party won a parliamentary majority with Thaksin's sister Yingluck Shinawatra elected as prime minister. For more information, on this see p696.

Troubles in the Deep South

Starting in 2001, Muslim separatist insurgents have been waging a low-scale war against the central government in Thailand's southernmost provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala. These three provinces once comprised the area of the historic kingdom of Patani until it was conquered by the Chakri kings. Under King Chulalongkorn, the traditional ruling elite were replaced with central government officials and bureaucrats from Bangkok. During WWII, a policy of nation-building set out to transform the multi-ethnic society into a unified and homogenous Thai Buddhist nation. This policy was resisted in the Deep South and gave birth to a strong separatist movement fighting for the independence of Patani. In the 1980s and '90s, the assimilation policy was abandoned and then-prime minister Prem promised support for Muslim cultural



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» Military response to student protests, 1976

1979

After three years of military rule, elections and parliament restored.

1980

Prem Tinsulanonda's government works to undermine the communist insurgency movement and eventually ends it with a political solution.

rights and religious freedoms. He also offered amnesty to the armed insurgents and implemented an economic development plan for the historically impoverished region.

The Thaksin regime took another approach to the region, which still ranks among the most economically and educationally depressed in the country. Greater central control was exerted and was viewed as a thinly disguised policy to break up the traditional stronghold of the Democrat Party. The policy succeeded in weakening relations between the local elite, Southern voters and the Democrats who had served as their representative in parliament. However, it did not take into consideration the sensitive and tenacious Muslim culture of the Deep South. In 2002, the government dissolved the long-standing inspectorate and the Army-run joint civilian-police-military border security office – a unit often lauded for maintaining peace and stability and providing a communication link between the Thai government and the southern Muslims. In its place the Thai provincial police assumed control of security though they lacked perceived moral authority and support of the local population. In 2004, the government responded harshly to demonstrations that resulted in the Krue Se Mosque and Tak Bai incidents, which together cost the lives of at least 180 Muslims, many of them unarmed civilians. In 2005, martial law was declared in the area.

It was widely believed that the 2006 coup, led by a Thai-Muslim general, could potentially settle the violence in the south but that has not come to pass. Bombings and shootings continue and the region has become a no-go zone.

For more information on the conflict in the Deep South, see the boxed text, p596.

TROUBLE IN THE TEMPLE FRONTIER

In 2008 Cambodia successfully petitioned Unesco to list the ancient Khmer temple of Khao Phra Wihan ('Preah Vihear' in Cambodian; see p432) as an official World Heritage Site. Remote and seemingly insignificant, the temple has long been a contentious issue between Cambodia and Thailand. A 1969 International Court of Justice case awarded Cambodia ownership of the temple, but both countries lay claim to a 4.6-sq-km area surrounding it. Four years since the Unesco decision, troops have been deployed to the border and periodically exchange fire.

Running up to the Thai general election of 2011, border tensions increased partly due to competing political interests in both countries. Cambodian leader Hun Sen is viewed as a Thaksin ally and was accused of using the dispute to make the Abhiset government look weak. Meanwhile anti-Thaksin groups in Thailand were accused of exploiting the issue as a nationalistic wedge to discredit pro-Thaksin sentiments. The struggle seems to have fizzled with the Puea Thai electoral win and a 2011 Thai-Cambodian border committee meeting resulted in an official statement of future cooperation.

1988

Chatichai Choonhavan becomes first elected PM since 1976; trade opens with Indochina.

1991-2

General Suchinda attempts to seize power; King Bhumibol intervenes to halt civil turmoil surrounding 'Black May' protests.

1997

Asian economic crisis; passage of historic 'people's constitution'.

2001

Telecommunications tycoon, Thaksin Shinawatra is elected prime minister.

Politics

Government

Much of the political drama that has unfolded since the 2006 coup involves a long-standing debate about how to structure Thailand's legislative body and, ultimately, who gets greater control. The National Assembly (or parliament of Thailand) currently has 630 members divided into two chambers (House of Representatives and the Senate) with a mix of seats being popularly elected and elected by party vote. The ratio of seats being popularly elected changes with each replacement constitution. The 1997 constitution, dubbed the People's Constitution, called for both chambers to be fully elected by popular vote. This power to the people paved the way for Thaksin and his well-loved Thai Rak Thai party to gain nearly complete control. The military and the elites have since rescinded such a popular structure, often arguing that full democratic representation doesn't work in Thailand.

When Thai voters go to the polls they cast a ballot for the constituency MP (member of parliament) and for their preferred party, the results of which are used to determine individual winners and proportional representation outcomes for the positions assigned by party vote.

The prime minister is the head of the government and is elected via legislative vote by the majority party. Under the current constitution, the prime minister must be a sitting MP.

Voting in Thailand is compulsory for all eligible citizens (over the age of 18) but members of the clergy are not allowed to vote. Voter turnout for national elections has steadily increased since the new millennium with 78% of registered voters casting ballots in 2007. Charges of vote-buying typically accompany every election. Anecdotally, local party leaders make their rounds through the villages handing out money for the promise of a vote. In some cases, villagers will accept money from competing parties and report that they have no loyalty at the ballot box.

The ballots include a 'no' vote if the voter wishes to choose 'none of the above'. It is also common to 'spoil' the ballot, or disqualify it, by writing on it or defacing it. During the 2005 general election a large number of ineligible ballots contained anti-Thaksin messages.

Media

Southeast Asian governments are not typically fond of uncensored media outlets, but Thailand often bucked this trend throughout the 1990s, even ensuring press freedoms in its 1997 constitution, albeit with fairly broad loopholes. That era came to an end with the ascension of Thaksin Shinawatra, a telecommunications billionaire, at the beginning of the 21st century. With Thaksin winning the prime ministership and his party holding a controlling majority, the press encountered the kind of censor-

The Democrat Party (Phak Prachathipat) founded in 1946 is now the longest-surviving political party in Thailand.

2004

Indian Ocean tsunami kills over 5000 people in Thailand and damages tourism and fishing industries; Muslim insurgency reignites in Deep South.

2006

King Bhumibol celebrates 60th year on the throne; Thaksin government overthrown in a coup and prime minister forced into exile.

2008

Cambodia successfully petitions Unesco to list Phra Wihan as a World Heritage Site, reigniting border tensions with Thailand.

2008

Yellow Shirt, pro-royalist activists seize Bangkok's international airports, causing weeklong shut-down.

SIGNS OF ELECTION

Preceding an election, Thai candidates paper the roadways and electricity poles with political billboards and signs. Traditional posters show the candidate posing seriously in an official uniform but recent trends include ad-like approaches with catchy slogans and evocative imagery.

Always a trendsetter, Chuvit Kamolvisit, former brothel owner turned political whistle-blower, won over voters with his 2011 'Angry Man' campaign ads, featuring him in grimacing and glaring poses expressing frustration and anger with the government. (Incidentally, one of his first acts in office was to expose an illegal Bangkok casino run by high-ranking police.)

Residents complain about the signs' obstruction of traffic but signmakers like the boost in business. All candidate posters are vulnerable to vandalism or theft, but the plastic ones are particularly desired as a makeshift sunshade or roof patch.

ship and legal intimidation not seen since the 1970s era of military dictatorships. The government filed a litany of defamation lawsuits against individuals, publications and media groups who printed embarrassing revelations about the Thaksin regime.

After the 2006 ousting of Thaksin, the media managed to retain its guarantees of press freedoms in the new constitution, but this was a 'paper promise' that did little to rescue the press from intimidation, lawsuits and physical attacks. Sweeping powers to ensure national security, often invoked against the press, were added to the emergency powers laws that went into effect after the coup.

Press intimidation in Thailand is made easier because of the country's *lèse majesté* laws – causing offence against the dignity of the monarchy – which carries a jail term of between three and 15 years. Often the media exercises self-censorship with regard to the monarchy, mainly out of respect for the crown, but also out of fear that political enemies will file *lèse majesté* charges.

Filing of *lèse majesté* charges has increased since 2006, mainly against political rivals, but also against journalists and even average citizens. Charges have been filed against a Thai Facebook user who posted a negative comment about the king and an overseas Thai who posted translations of a banned book about the king on his blog.

Publications that the government views as presenting an unflattering role of the monarchy are often banned. Several critical issues of *The Economist* have been banned since 2006. Internet censorship is also on the rise and so-called Red Shirt (pro-Thaksin) radio stations based in the northeast have been shut down by the government.

2010

Red Shirt, pro-Thaksin activists occupy central Bangkok for two months; military crackdown results in 91 deaths.

2011

Puea Thai party wins general election; Yingluck Shinawatra becomes Thailand's first female prime minister.



» Red-shirt protesters at Democracy Monument, Bangkok

Festivals

There is no better way to tap into Thailand's traditional folkways than to attend a festival, be it a provincial parade or a national shindig. In addition, festivals give Thais an excuse to do their two favourite pastimes: socialise and eat (which are never mutually exclusive).

Loi Krathong festival (p358), Chiang Mai



Top Festivals

Thailand's festivals are vibrant affairs in which religion and culture take to the streets. Traditional dance and music are features, as are some modern twists on the old ways.

Loi Krathong

1 This elegant festival alights the night with small boats adorned with flowers and lit candles set adrift in waterways across the country. The offerings thank the river goddess for irrigation and transport. Sukhothai (p358) is famous for this tradition.

Vegetarian Festival

2 Inherited from Chinese immigrants, this nine-day holiday from meat is lovingly practised in Bangkok and other Thai cities with historic Chinese populations. Food stalls with yellow banners turn the usual meaty stir-fry into a soy-based meal. In Phuket, the festival (p618) has a self-mortification parade.

Long-Tail Boat Races

3 In ancient times, long-tail boats, powered by up to 50 men, would race during end-of-rainy season celebrations (Ork Phansaa). A survivor of that era is the International Swan Boat Race (p164), held in Ayuthaya, that pits international and domestic teams.

Hua Hin Jazz Festival

4 To honour the king's jazz interest, this two-day festival assembles domestic and international ensembles to jam on the beach. Music-lovers lay out a beach blanket and listen as the waves lap in time (p517).

Candle Parade Festival, Ubon Ratchathani

5 During Khao Phansaa (Buddhist Lent), merit-makers donate essential and ceremonial items (such as candles) to the temples. In Ubon Ratchathani, the simple candle offerings became huge wax sculptures that are paraded through the town (p436).

Clockwise from top left

1. Launching lanterns for Loi Krathong, Chiang Mai
2. Self-mortification during the Vegetarian Festival, Phuket
3. Long-tail boat race during Ork Phansaa, Sakon Nakhon
4. Hua Hin Jazz Festival



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Songkran

Water mayhem ushers in the traditional Thai New Year in mid-April. It is a time of cleansing, renewal and loading up pick-up trucks with beds armed with super soakers to douse other water warriors.

Thailand's most famous festival didn't start out as a water war. Once upon a time it was a quiet festival of house cleaning, resolutions and temple festivities. Traditionally the temple's primary Buddha was ceremoniously bathed, often by being paraded about as the faithful dutifully splashed water on it. In fact water 'splashing' (not 'shooting') is a common component of New Year's festivals throughout Southeast Asia and even parts of China. Afterwards water might be sprinkled on the hands of elderly family members or playfully splashed on friends as a way of wishing them luck. The cleansing powers of water also offers refreshment during the hottest time of the year.

It isn't hard to imagine how the splashing water custom would eventually evolve into a throwing, launching and soaking wet party. Luck is said to be measured by how doused (not soured or drunk) you are and so those roving water-hurling bands are just wishing you a whole lot of luck in the year to come.

TOP SONGKRAN SPOTS

- » **Bangkok** (p104) Head to Th Khao San for serious water battles.
- » **Chiang Mai** (p258) Line up along the moat to splash and be splashed.
- » **Ayuthaya** (p165) and **Sukhothai** Tame and traditional versions for Songkran purists.

Clockwise from top left

1. Having fun, Bangkok
2. Hill-tribe girls at a Songkran ceremony, Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai
3. Incense and candle offerings during Songkran celebrations at Sanam Luang, Bangkok





1

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4

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Buddhist Lent

July to October, one of the holiest periods of the Buddhist calendar, coincides with the rainy season. It is a period of reflection, meditation and religious observances.

The start of Khao Phansaa (Buddhist Lent) is observed on the first day of the waning moon in the eighth lunar month. This is the traditional time for young men to enter the monkhood and earn merit for their family and maturity for themselves. Thai men who have not yet become monks are often viewed as 'unripe'. Buddhist Lent is also known as the rains retreat, when monks withdraw into the monastery. The practice dates to the historical Buddha when monks were itinerant preachers and foul weather made travel difficult. The start of the rains also initiated the planting season and the potential for trampling on young seedlings was a concern.

Many merit-making activities define this period for the laity. Buddhist faithful present the monks with once-useful offerings of candles and lamp oil, which have now become symbols of spiritual illumination.

The end of Buddhist lent (three lunar months later) is known as Ork Phansaa. The temples observe the *gà-tin* ceremony, in which new robes are given to the monks by merit-makers. Folk practices herald the end of the rains with long-tail-boat races.

TOP BUDDHIST LENT FESTIVALS

- » **Ubun Ratchathani's Candle Parade Festival** (p436) Elaborate wax candles become religious works of art.
- » **Nong Khai's Naga Fireballs** (p465) Mysterious gaseous balls rise out of the Mekong River.
- » **Nakhon Phanom's Illuminated Boat Festival** (p483) Electrified boats turn the Mekong River into a mini-disco.

Clockwise from top left & following page

1. Loi Krathong offerings 2. *Moo-ay tai* dancer at Ork Phansaa parade, Sakon Nakhon 3. The Candle Festival during Khao Phansaa, Ubun Ratchathani 4. Long-tail-boat races, Ork Phansaa festivities, Sakon Nakhon 5. Loi Krathong, Chiang Mai 6. Vegetarian Festival, Phuket



2

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5

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The People & Culture

Thailand's cohesive national identity provides a unifying patina for ethnic and regional differences that evolved through historical migrations and geographic kinships with ethnically diverse neighbours.

Ethnic Makeup

Some 75% of the citizens of Thailand are ethnic Thais, providing a superficial view of sameness. But subtle regional differences do exist. In the central plains (Chao Phraya delta), Siamese Thais united the country through its historic kingdoms and promulgated its culture and language. Today the central Thai dialect is the national standard and Bangkok exports unified culture through popular media and standardised education.

The northeast (Isan) has always stood apart from the rest of the country, sharing closer ethnic and cultural ties with Laos and the Thai Lao people. The Isan dialect differs from central Thai, folk beliefs vary and even the local ingredients in *sôm-dam* (spicy papaya salad) mark a cultural shift: *sôm-dam* Lao contains field crabs, while standard *sôm-dam* contains peanuts. In the northeastern provinces that border Cambodia, there is a distinct Khmer influence as many families migrated across the border during historical tumult. A minority tribe, known as Suay lives near Surin and Khorat (Nakhon Ratchasima) and are traditional elephant mahouts; with the expansion of the elephant-tourism business many Suay people have relocated across the country for job opportunities.

Thai Pak Tai people define the characteristics of the south. The dialect is a little faster than standard Thai, the curries are a lot spicier, and there

Thailand Demographics

- » Population: 66.7 million
- » Fertility rate: 1.6
- » Percentage of people over 65: 9.2%
- » Urbanisation rate: 34%
- » Life expectancy: 73 years

THE INVISIBLE BURMESE

Due to the ongoing dysfunction of the Myanmar state, there is an increasing exodus of Burmese to Thailand. Approximately 150,000 people have entered the kingdom as political and ethnic refugees but the vast majority are economic migrants (estimated at two to three million but less than half are documented). They fill the low-level jobs – fish-processing, construction, domestic and factory work – that used to employ unskilled northeastern Thai labourers. In part, many Thais believe that the country needs this imported workforce as the population is ageing faster than it is reproducing.

However, the emerging immigration 'situation' has not been dealt with as swiftly by the government as the private sector. Because many of the Burmese immigrants are residing and working in the country illegally, they are subjected to exploitative relationships with employers that many activists describe as modern-day slavery. The Burmese can't return home due to persecution by the military regime and they can't turn to the Thai authorities in cases of workplace abuse because they would face deportation.

A MODERN PERSPECTIVE ON THE HILL TRIBES

Hill tribes tend to have among the lowest standards of living in Thailand. Although it could be tempting to correlate this quality of life with traditional lifestyles, their situation is compounded, in most cases, by not having Thai citizenship. Without the latter, they don't have the right to own land, educate their children, earn a minimum wage or access health care. In the last decades some members of hill-tribe groups have been issued Thai identification cards, which enable them to access national programs (in theory, though, extra 'fees' might prevent families from being able to afford public schooling and health care). Other hill-tribe families have received residency certificates that restrict travel outside of an assigned district, in turn limiting access to job opportunities associated with a mobile modern society.

Furthermore, the Thai government has pursued a 30-year policy of hill-tribe relocation, often moving villages from fertile agricultural land to infertile land, in turn removing the tribes from a viable subsistence system in which tribal customs were intact to a market system in which they can't adequately compete and in which tribal ways have been fractured.

In the past decade, the expansion of tourism into the mountainous regions of the north presents a complicating factor to the independence of hill-tribe villages. City speculators will buy land from hill-tribe farmers for fairly nominal sums only to be resold, usually to resorts, for much higher costs if the documentation of ownership can be procured. (In many cases the hill-tribe farmer doesn't own the land rights and has very little bargaining power when approached by outsiders.) The displaced farmer and his family might then migrate to the city, losing their connection to their rural and tribal lifestyle with few resources to succeed in the lowland society.

is more mixing of Muslim folk beliefs into the regional culture thanks to the geographic proximity to Malaysia and the historic Muslim population.

If you were to redraw Thailand's borders according to ethnicity and culture, northern Thailand would be united with parts of southern China and northern Myanmar. The traditional homeland of the Tai people was believed to be the Yunnan region of China. There are also many sub-groups, including the Shan (an ethnic cousin to the Thais who settled in the highlands of Burma) and the Tai Lü (who settled in Nan and Chiang Rai province as well as the Vietnam highlands).

People of Chinese ancestry – second- or third-generation Hakka, Teochew, Hainanese or Cantonese – make up 14% of the population. Bangkok and the nearby coastal areas have a large population of immigrants from China who came for economic opportunities in the early to mid-20th century. In northern Thailand there is also a substantial number of Hui-Chinese Muslims who emigrated from Yunnan in the late 19th century.

China and Thailand have long been linked through trade, migration and cultural commonalities. Many families have intermarried with Thais and have interwoven traditional Chinese customs into the predominant Thai culture. Historically wealthy Chinese introduced their daughters to the royal court as consorts, developing royal connections and adding a Chinese bloodline that extends to the current king. The mercantile centres of most Thai towns are run by Thai-Chinese families and many places in the country celebrate Chinese festivals such as the annual Vegetarian Festival.

The second-largest ethnic minority are the Malays (4.6%), most of whom reside in the provinces of the Deep South. The remaining minority groups include smaller percentages of non-Thai-speaking people such as the Vietnamese, Khmer, Mon, Semang (Sakai), Moken (*chow lair*; also spelt *chao leh*; people of the sea, or 'sea gypsies'), Htin, Mabri, Khamu

Many NGOs in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai work with hill-tribe communities to provide education, health care and advocacy efforts. The Mirror Foundation (<http://themirrorfoundation.org/cms/>) and Association for Akha Education (www.akhathai.org) are two long-running NGOs that accept volunteers.

and a variety of hill tribes. A small number of Europeans and other non-Asians reside in Bangkok and the provinces.

Hill Tribes

Ethnic minorities in the mountainous regions of northern Thailand are often called 'hill tribes', or in Thai vernacular, *chow k'ow* (mountain people). Each hill tribe has its own language, customs, mode of dress and spiritual beliefs.

Most are of seminomadic origin, having come from Tibet, Myanmar, China and Laos during the past 200 years or so. They are 'fourth-world' people in that they belong neither to the main aligned powers nor to the developing nations. Rather, they have crossed and continue to cross national borders, often fleeing oppression by other cultures, without regard for recent nationhood.

Language and culture constitute the borders of their world. Some groups are caught between the 6th and 21st centuries, while others are gradually being assimilated into modern life. Many tribespeople are also moving into lowland areas as montane lands become deforested.

Akha (I-kaw)

Population: 70,000

Origin: Tibet

Present locations: Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Yunnan

Economy: dry rice, corn, beans, peppers

Belief system: animism with an emphasis on ancestor worship; some groups are Christian

Cultural characteristics: The Akha are among the poorest of Thailand's ethnic minorities and reside mainly in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces, along mountain ridges or steep slopes 1000m to 1400m in altitude. They're regarded as skilled farmers but are often displaced from arable land because of government intervention. The well-known Akha Swing Ceremony takes place from mid-August to mid-September, between rice planting and harvest time. Akha houses are constructed of wood and bamboo, usually atop short wooden stilts and roofed with thick grass. At the entrance of every traditional Akha village stands a simple wooden gateway consisting of two vertical struts joined by a lintel. Akha shamans affix various charms made from bamboo strips to the gateway to prevent malevolent spirits from entering. Standing next to each village gateway are the crude wooden figures of a man and a woman, each bearing exaggerated sexual organs, in the belief that human sexuality is abhorrent to the spirit world.

Akha are focused on family ties and will recite their personal genealogies upon first meetings to determine a shared ancestor.

Their traditional clothing consists of a headdress of beads, feathers and dangling silver ornaments.

The Tribal Research Institute in Chiang Mai recognises 10 different hill tribes but there may be up to 20. Hill tribes are increasingly integrating into the Thai mainstream and many of the old ways are disappearing.



Hmong (Mong or Maew)

Population: 151,000

Origin: south China

Present locations: south China, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam

Economy: rice, corn, cabbages, strawberries

Belief system: animism

Cultural characteristics: The Hmong are Thailand's second-largest hill-tribe group and are especially numerous in Chiang Mai Province

with smaller enclaves in the other northern Thai provinces. They usually live on mountain peaks or plateaus above 1000m. Kinship is patrilineal and polygamy is permitted.

Hmong tribespeople wear simple black jackets and indigo or black baggy trousers with striped borders (White Hmong) or indigo skirts (Blue Hmong) and silver jewellery. Sashes may be worn around the waist, and embroidered aprons draped front and back. Most women wear their hair in a bun.



Karen (Yang or Kariang)

Population: 420,000

Origin: Myanmar

Present locations: Thailand, Myanmar

Economy: rice, vegetables, livestock

Belief system: animism, Buddhism, Christianity, depending on the group

Cultural characteristics: The Karen are the largest hill-tribe group in Thailand and number about 47% of the total tribal population. They

tend to live in lowland valleys and practise crop rotation rather than swidden agriculture. Their numbers and proximity to mainstream society have made them the most integrated and financially successful of the hill-tribe groups. Karen homes are built on low stilts or posts, with the roofs swooping quite low. There are four distinct Karen groups – the Skaw (White) Karen, Pwo Karen, Pa-O (Black) Karen and Kayah (Red) Karen.

Thickly woven V-neck tunics of various colours are typically worn (though unmarried women wear white). Kinship is matrilineal and marriage is monogamous.



Lahu (Musoe)

Population: 103,000

Origin: Tibet

Present locations: south China, Thailand, Myanmar

Economy: dry rice, corn

Belief system: theistic animism; some groups are Christian

Cultural characteristics: The Thai term for this tribe, *moo-seu*, is derived from a Burmese word meaning 'hunter', a reference to their skill in the forest. The Lahu tend to live at about 1000m altitude and can be found in remote areas of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Tak provinces. They typically live in mixed ethnic villages and are an ethnically diverse group with five main subsets: Red Lahu (the most numerous Lahu group in Thailand), Black Lahu, White Lahu, Yellow Lahu and Lahu Sheleh. Houses are built of wood, bamboo and grass, and usually stand on short wooden posts. Lahu food is probably the spiciest of all the hill-tribe cuisines.

Traditional dress consists of black-and-red jackets with narrow skirts worn by women; bright green or blue-green baggy trousers worn by men.



Lisu (Lisaw)

Population: 55,000

Origin: Tibet

Present locations: Thailand, Yunnan

Economy: rice, corn, livestock

Belief system: animism with ancestor worship and spirit possession

Cultural characteristics: Lisu villages are usually in the mountains at an elevation of about 1000m and occur in eight Thai provinces: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, Phayao, Tak, Kamphaeng Phet, Sukhothai and Lampang. Patrilineal clans have pan-tribal jurisdiction, which makes the Lisu unique among hill-tribe groups (most of which have power centred with either a shaman or a village headman). Homes are built on the ground and consist mostly of bamboo and thatched grass.

The women wear long multi-coloured tunics over trousers and sometimes black turbans with tassels. Men wear baggy green or blue pants pegged in at the ankles.



Mien (Yao)

Population: 35,500

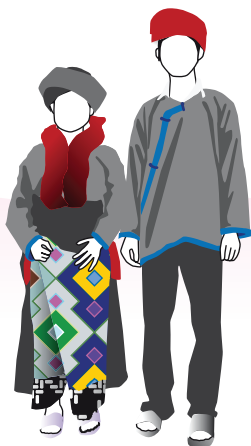
Origin: central China

Present locations: Thailand, south China, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam

Economy: dry rice, corn

Belief system: animism with ancestor worship, Taoism, Buddhism and Christianity

Cultural characteristics: The Mien are highly skilled at crafts such as embroidery and silversmithing. They settle near mountain springs at between 1000m and 1200m with a concentration in Nan, Phayao and Chi-



ang Rai provinces and a few communities in Chiang Mai, Lam-pang and Sukhothai. Migration into Thailand increased during the American War era when the Mien collaborated with the CIA against Pathet Lao forces; 50,000 Mien refugees were resettled in the US. The Mien are heavily influenced by Chinese traditions and they use Chinese characters to write their language. Kinship is patrilineal and marriage is polygamous. Houses are built at ground level, out of wood or bamboo thatch.

Women wear trousers and black jackets with intricately embroidered patches and red furlike collars, along with large dark-blue or black turbans. Men wear black tunics and black pants.

The Thai Character

Much of Thailand's cultural value system is hinged upon respect for the family, religion and monarchy. Within that system each person knows his or her place and Thai children are strictly instructed in the importance of group conformity, respecting elders and suppressing confrontational views. In most social situations, establishing harmony often takes a leading role and Thais take personal pride in making others feel at ease.

Sà-nùk

In general, Thais place high value on *sà-nùk*, which means 'fun'. It is often regarded as a necessary underpinning of anything worth doing. Even work and studying should have an element of *sà-nùk*, otherwise it automatically becomes drudgery. This doesn't mean Thais don't want to work, but they labour best as a group, so as to avoid loneliness and ensure an element of playfulness. Nothing condemns an activity more than *mái sà-nùk* (not fun). The back-breaking work of rice farming, the tedium of long-distance bus driving, the dangers of a construction site: Thais often mix their job tasks with a healthy dose of socialising. Watch these workers in action and you'll see them flirting with each other, trading insults or cracking jokes.

Saving Face

Thais believe strongly in the concept of saving face, ie avoiding confrontation and endeavouring not to embarrass themselves or other people (except when it's *sà-nùk* to do so). The ideal face-saver doesn't bring up

The Lahu people are known for their strict adherence to gender equality.

negative topics in conversation, doesn't express firm convictions or opinions, and doesn't claim to have an expertise. Agreement and harmony are considered to be the most important social graces.

While Westerners might think a heated discussion OK, Thais avoid such confrontations and regard any instance where voices are raised as rude and potentially volatile. Losing your temper causes a loss of face for those present and Thais who have been crossed may react in extreme ways.

Minor embarrassments, such as tripping or falling, might elicit giggles from a crowd of Thais. In this case they aren't taking delight in your mishap, but helping you save face by laughing it off.

Status & Obligation

All relationships in traditional Thai society – and those in the modern Thai milieu as well – are governed by social rank defined by age, wealth, status and personal or political position. The elder position is called *pôo yài* (literally the 'big person') and is used to describe parents, bosses, village heads, public officials etc. The junior position is called *pôo nôy* (little person) and describes anyone who is subservient to the *pôo yài*. Although this tendency towards social ranking is to some degree shared by many societies around the world, the Thai twist lies in the set of mutual obligations linking the elder to the junior.

Pôo nôy are supposed to show obedience and respect (together these concepts are covered by the single Thai term *grewng jai*) towards the elder. Those with junior status are not supposed to question or criticise those with elder status be it in the office, the home or the government. In the workplace, this means younger staff members are not encouraged to speak during meetings and are expected to do their bosses' bidding.

In return *pôo yài* are obligated to care for or 'sponsor' the *pôo nôy*. It is a paternalistic relationship in which *pôo nôy* can ask for favours involving money or job access. *Pôo yài* reaffirm their rank by granting requests when possible; to refuse would be to risk a loss of face and status.

The protocol defined by the social hierarchy governs almost every aspect of Thai behaviour within family units, business organisations, schools and the government. Elected or appointed officials occupy one of the highest rungs on the social ladder and often regard themselves as caretakers of the people, a stark contrast to the democratic ideal of being the voice of the people. The complicated personal hierarchy in Thailand often prevents collaboration, especially between those with competing status. This is why Bangkok has several modern-art museums with somewhat anaemic collections rather than one consolidated powerhouse.

Most foreign visitors will interact with a simplified version of this elder-junior relationship in the form of *pêe* (elder sibling) and *nôrng* (younger sibling). All Thais refer to each other using familial names. Even people unrelated by blood quickly establish who's *pêe* and who's *nôrng*. This is why one of the first questions Thais ask new acquaintances is 'How old are you?'

Thais are fastidious in their personal appearance, often bathing twice a day, and are confused that seemingly wealthy foreigners are so unkempt.

The famous Thai smile comes in part from their desire to enjoy themselves and lighten the load of daily life.

The Thai equivalent of giving someone the middle finger is to show them the bottom of the foot.

THE NICKNAME GAME

At birth Thai babies are given auspicious first names, often bestowed by the family patriarch or matriarch. These poetic names are then relegated to bureaucratic forms and name cards, while the child is introduced to everyone else by a one-syllable nickname. Thai nicknames are usually playful and can be inspired by the child's appearance (Moo, meaning 'pig', if he/she is chubby) or a favourite pastime (Toon, short for 'cartoon' for avid TV-watchers). Girls will typically be named Lek or Noi (both of which means 'small'). Some parents even go so far as imprinting their interests on their children's names: Golf (as in the sport) and Benz (as in the car).

Lifestyle

Individual lifestyles vary according to family background, income and geography. In many ways Bangkok is its own phenomenon where upper- and middle-class Thais wake up to an affluent and increasingly Westernised world with all the mod cons: smartphones, fast food, K-pop music and fashion addictions. The amount of disposable income in Bangkok is unparalleled elsewhere in the country and to some degree is a source of contempt for the rest of the country, which views the capital as excessively materialistic.

The economic boom years of the 2000s aided the ascent of the working class, some of whom have migrated to commercial and tourism cities where they could earn enough to pay off debts and catapult their children from labourers to professionals. Many also thank former prime minister Thaksin's populist measures for providing economic relief to this beleaguered sector of the society.

Young Thais are opportunity migrants, leaving small villages and small towns for job prospects in the service industry or the big cities. They form their own urban tribes in their adopted cities and return home for holidays. Regardless of the job, most Thais send a portion of their pay home to their parents or to support dependent children left behind to be raised in the village.

More traditional family units and professions can be found in the provincial capitals across the country. The civil servants – teachers and government employees – make up the backbone of the Thai middle class and live in nuclear families in terrace housing estates outside the city centre. Some might live in the older in-town neighbourhoods filled with front-yard gardens growing papayas, mangoes and other fruit trees. The business class lives in the city centre, usually in apartments above shopfronts, making for an easy commute but a fairly urban life. In the cool hours of the day, the wage earners and students head to the nearest park to jog, play badminton or join in the civic-run aerobics classes.

One of the best places to view the Thai 'lifestyle' is at the markets. Day markets sell kitchen staples as well as local produce and regional desserts. Night markets are good for dinner and people-watching as few Thais bother to cook for themselves.

Though fewer people toil in the rice paddies than in the past, the villages still survive on the outskirts of the urban grid. Here life is set to the seasons, the fashions are purchased from the market and if the water buffaloes could talk they'd know all the village gossip.

From a demographic perspective Thailand, like most of Asia, is greying. Women pursue careers instead of husbands; unmarried women now

The official year in Thailand is reckoned from 543 BC, the beginning of the Buddhist Era, so that AD 2011 is BE 2554, AD 2012 is BE 2555 etc.

SOCK IT TO ME

Sometimes called Siamese football in old English texts, *đà-grôr* is a homegrown sport that involves fancy footwork and a woven rattan ball. Players typically stand in a circle (the size depends on the number of players) and simply try to keep the ball airborne by kicking it between each other. Points are scored for style, difficulty and variety of kicking manoeuvres. This form of the game is often played by friends wherever there's a little room: a vacant lot, school playground and sandy beaches.

A popular variation on *đà-grôr* – and the one used in intramural or international competitions – is played like volleyball, with a net, but with only the feet and head permitted to touch the ball. It's amazing to see the players perform aerial pirouettes, spiking the ball over the net with their feet. Another variation has players kicking the ball into a hoop 4.5m above the ground – basketball with feet, and no backboard!

Đà-grôr was introduced to the Southeast Asian Games by Thailand, and international championships tend to alternate between the Thais and Malaysians.

comprise 30% of the population (plus they start to outnumber men in their 30s). Successful government-sponsored family-planning efforts and professional opportunities have reduced the fertility rate so successfully – from six children in the 1960s to 1.6 children today – that analysts are now warning of future labour shortages and overextended pension systems.

Religion

Religion is alive and well in Thailand and colourful examples of daily worship can be found on nearly every corner. Walk the streets early in the morning and you'll see the solemn procession of Buddhist monks, with shaved heads and orange-coloured robes, engaged in *bin-dá-bàht*, the daily house-to-house alms food gathering.

Although the country is predominantly Buddhist, the minority religions often practise alongside one another. The green-hued onion domes of the mosques mark a neighbourhood as Muslim in pockets of Bangkok and in southern towns. In urban centres, large rounded doorways inscribed with Chinese characters and flanked by red paper lanterns marked *sǎhn jów*, Chinese temples dedicated to the worship of Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian deities.

Buddhism

Approximately 95% of Thai people are Theravada Buddhists, a branch of Buddhism that came from Sri Lanka during the Sukhothai period.

The ultimate end of Theravada Buddhism is *nibbana* ('nirvana' in Sanskrit), which literally means the 'blowing out' or extinction of all grasping and thus of all suffering (*dukkha*). Effectively, *nibbana* is also an end to the cycle of rebirths (both moment-to-moment and life-to-life) that is existence.

In reality, most Thai Buddhists aim for rebirth in a 'better' existence rather than the supramundane goal of *nibbana*. The concept of rebirth is almost universally accepted in Thailand, even by non-Buddhists.

The idea of reincarnation also provides Thais with a sense of humility and interconnectedness. They might observe a creepy-crawly in the bushes and feel that perhaps they too were once like that creature or that a deceased relative now occupies a non-human body. Reflecting Thailand's social stratification, reincarnation is basically a reward or punishment. Live a good life and be reborn higher up the social ladder or behave badly throughout your life and come back in a lowlier form, such as an insect.

The new generation's upward mobility has erased some of the over-reliance on fate as a key to success but even cosmopolitan types still adhere to the Buddhist theory of karma, expressed in the Thai proverb *tam dee, dái dee; tam chóa, dái chóa* (good actions bring good results; bad actions bring bad results). A good person can improve their lot in life today and in future lives by making merit (*tam bun*): offering food and donations to the monks and performing regular worship at the local wát. Merit-making can also result in success in business, academic tests, finding love, getting pregnant and a host of other concerns.

The Buddhist hierarchy in Thailand is made up of the Tiratana (Triple Gems) – the Buddha, the *dhamma* (the teachings) and the *sangha* (the Buddhist community). The Buddha, in his myriad sculptural forms, is found on a high shelf in the most understated roadside restaurants as well as in expensive Bangkok hotels. The *dhamma* is chanted morning and evening in every temple and taught to every Thai citizen in primary school. The *sangha* is the orange-robed monks, who carry on the day-to-day business of the religion. In temple architecture, the three-tiered roof represents the Triple Gems.

Historically the Thai king has occupied a revered position in Thai Buddhism, often viewed as semi-divine. Thai royal ceremonies remain almost exclusively the domain of Brahman priests, bestowed with the

Lifestyle Statistics

- » Average age for marriage for a Thai man/woman: 27/24 years
- » Minimum daily wage in Bangkok: 206B
- » Entry-level government salary: 9000B per month

RICE

Thailand is often touted as the rice basket of the world; it produces 20 million tonnes per year, dividing the crop in half for domestic consumption and export.

Reincarnation is a popular topic in Thai movies and books; in the movie *Citizen Dog*, the male lead receives unsolicited advice from his deceased grandmother who has been reborn as a gecko.

Spiritual Readings

- » *Being Dharma: The Essence of the Buddha's Teachings* (2001; Ajahn Chah)
- » Access to Insight (www.accesstoinsight.org)
- » *Thai Folk Wisdom: Contemporary Takes on Traditional Proverbs* (2010; Tulaya Pornpiriyakulchai and Jane Vejajiviva)
- » *Sacred Tattoos of Thailand* (2011; Joe Cummings)

duty of preserving the three pillars of Thai nationhood, namely sovereignty, religion and the monarchy.

Thai Buddhism has no particular Sabbath day but there are holy days (*wan prá*), which occur every seventh or eighth day depending on phases of the moon. There are also religious holidays, typically marking important events in the Buddha's life. During these holy days Thais will go to the temple to listen to teachings, make merit and circumnavigate the main sanctuary three times.

Merit-Making

Thais visit temple for spiritual enlightenment as well as cultural entertainment. They might make a dedicated day trip to an important temple or include a merit-making stop en route to another outing. During these visits, merit-making is an individual ritual rather than the congregational affair. Worshippers buy offerings such as lotus buds, incense and candles and present these symbolic gifts to the temple's primary Buddha image. The flowers are placed on the altar, and the worshipper kneels (or stands, in the case of outdoor altars) before the Buddha image with three lit incense sticks placed between the palms in a prayerlike gesture. The head is bowed towards the floor and the hands are then raised between the heart and the forehead three times before the incense is planted at the altar. A square of thin gold paper is then affixed to the Buddha image.

Other merit-making activities include offering food to the temple *sangha*, meditating (individually or in groups), listening to monks chanting *suttas* (Buddhist discourse), and attending a *têht* or *dhamma* talk by the abbot or another respected teacher.

Monks & Nuns

Socially, every Thai male is expected to become a monk (*bhikkhu* in Pali; *prá* or *prá píe-sù* in Thai) for a short period in his life, optimally between the time he finishes school and the time he starts a career or marries. A family earns great merit when one of its sons 'takes robe and bowl'. Traditionally, the length of time spent in the *wát* is three months, during the *pan-sáh* (Buddhist lent), which begins in July and coincides with the rainy season. However, nowadays men may spend as little as a week to accrue merit as monks. Most temporary ordinations occur under the age of 20 years old, when a man may enter the *sangha* as a 10-vow novice (*nairn*).

Monks are required to shave their heads, eyebrows and any facial hair during their residence in the monastery as a sign of renouncing worldly concerns. They are also required to live an ascetic life free of luxury and eat one meal per day (sometimes two, depending on the temple traditions). Monks who live in the city usually emphasise study of the Buddhist scriptures, while those who opt for the forest temples tend to emphasise meditation. Fully ordained monks perform funeral and marriage rites, conduct sermons and instruct monastic teachings.

In rural areas, the monastery is also a social institution, providing charity outreach to the sick and the poor. Male children can enter the monastery and receive a free education, a tradition that was more prevalent before the advent of the public-schooling system. Monks also take on social-justice and environmental causes; a number of revered monks have protested dam-building, or wrapped trees in sacred cloth to prevent illegal logging.

In Thai Buddhism, women who seek a monastic life are given a minor role in the temple that is not equal to full monkhood. A Buddhist nun is known as *máa chee* (mother priest) and lives as an *atthasila* (eight-precept) nun, a position traditionally occupied by women who had no other place in society. Thai nuns shave their heads, wear white robes and take

HOUSES OF THE HOLY

Many homes or inhabited dwellings in Thailand have an associated 'spirit house', built to provide a residence for the plot of land's *prá poom* (guardian spirits). Based on animistic beliefs that predate Buddhism, guardian spirits are believed to reside in rivers, trees and other natural features and need to be honoured (and placated). The guardian spirit of a particular plot of land is the supernatural equivalent of a mother-in-law, an honoured but sometimes troublesome family member. To keep the spirits happily distracted, Thais erect elaborate dollhouse-like structures on the property where the spirits can 'live' comfortably separated from human affairs. To further cultivate good relations and good fortune, daily offerings of rice, fruit, flowers and water are made to the spirit house. If the human house is enlarged the spirit house must also be enlarged, so that the spirits do not feel slighted. Spirit houses must be consecrated by a Brahman priest.

care of temple chores. Generally speaking, *mâa chee* aren't considered as prestigious as monks and don't have a function in the merit-making rituals of lay people.

Islam

At around 4% of the population, Muslims make up Thailand's largest religious minority, living side by side with the Buddhist majority. There are some 3000 mosques in Thailand – over 200 in Bangkok alone. Of these mosques, 99% are associated with the Sunni branch of Islam (in which Islamic leadership is vested in the consensus of the Ummah, or Muslim community), and 1% with the Shi'ite branch (in which religious and political authority is given to descendants of the Prophet Mohammed).

Islam was introduced to Thailand's southern region between AD 1200 and 1500 through the influence of Indian and Arab traders and scholars. To this day, most of Thailand's Muslims reside in the south, concentrated in the regions of Pattani, Narathiwat, Satun and Yala. These southerners trace their heritage to the former Kingdom of Pattani, an Islamic kingdom whose territory straddled the present-day border between Thailand and Malaysia. Accordingly, the south shares both a border and a cultural heritage with its predominantly Muslim neighbour, Malaysia. Indeed, most of Thailand's southern Muslims are ethnically Malay and speak Malay or Yawi (a dialect of Malay written in the Arabic script) in addition to Thai. These cultural differences, coupled with a perception of religious and linguistic discrimination, have led to a feeling of disconnection from the Buddhist majority in some parts of the Muslim-dominated south.

The Theravada school is often called the southern school because it travelled from the Indian subcontinent to Southeast Asia, while Mahayana Buddhism was adopted throughout the northern regions of Nepal, Tibet, China and the rest of east Asia.

Arts

Thailand has an intensely visual culture and an appreciation of beauty that infuses audacious temple buildings, humble old-fashioned houses and the high arts developed for the royal court.

Architecture

Most striking of Thailand's architectural heritage are the Buddhist temples, which dazzle in the tropical sun with wild colours and soaring roof-lines. A classic component of temple architecture is the presence of one or more *chedi* (stupa), a mountain-shaped monument that pays tribute to the enduring stability of Buddhism. Many contain relics of important kings or the historical Buddha.

Thai temples rely heavily on Hindu-Buddhist iconography as artistic flourishes and instructional guides. *Naga*, a mythical serpentlike creature, guarded Buddha during meditation and is often depicted in

entrance railings and outlining roof gables. On the tip of the roof is the *chôr fâh*: a golden bird-shaped silhouette suggesting flight.

The lotus bud is another sacred motif that is often used to decorate the tops of the temple gates, verandah columns and the spires of Sukhothai-era *chedi*. Images of the Buddha often depict him meditating in a lotus blossom-shaped pedestal. It carries with it a reminder of the tenets of Buddhism. The lotus can bloom even in a rancid pond, illustrating the capacity for religious perfection to flourish even in unlikely situations.

Thais began mixing traditional architecture with European forms in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The port cities of Thailand, including Bangkok and Phuket, acquired fine examples of Sino-Portuguese architecture – buildings of stuccoed brick decorated with an ornate facade – a style that followed the sea traders during the colonial era. This style is often referred to as ‘old Bangkok’ or ‘Ratanakosin’.

Bangkok’s relatively modern skyscrapers are textbook examples of postmodern *dos* and *don’ts*. In the 1960s and ‘70s the trend in modern Thai architecture, inspired by the European Bauhaus movement,

THAILAND’S ARTISTIC PERIODS

PERIOD	TEMPLE & CHEDI STYLES	BUDDHA STYLES	EXAMPLES
Dvaravati Period (7th–11th Centuries)	Rectangular-based <i>chedi</i> with stepped tiers	Indian influenced; thick torso, large hair curls, arched eyebrows (like flying birds), protruding eyes, thick lips and flat nose.	Phra Pathom Chedi, Nakhon Pathom; Lopburi Museum, Lopburi; Wat Chama Thewi, Lamphun
Srivijaya Period (7th–13th Centuries)	Mahayana-Buddhist style temples; Javanese-style <i>chedi</i> with elaborate arches	Indian influenced; heavily ornamented, humanlike features and slightly twisted at the waist.	Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahavihaan and National Museum, Nakhon Si Thammarat
Khmer Period (9th–11th Centuries)	Hindu-Buddhist temples; corn-cob shaped <i>prang</i> (Khmer-styled <i>chedi</i>)	Buddha meditating under a canopy of the seven-headed <i>naga</i> and atop a lotus pedestal.	Phimai Historical Park, Nakhon Ratchasima; Phanom Rung Historical Park, Surin
Chiang Saen-Lanna Period (11th–13th Centuries)	Teak temples; square-based <i>chedi</i> topped by gilded umbrella; also octagonal-based <i>chedi</i>	Burmese influences with plump figure, round, smiling face and footpads facing upwards in meditation pose.	Wat Phra Singh, Chiang Mai; Chiang Saen National Museum, Chiang Saen
Sukhothai Period (13th–15th Centuries)	Khmer-inspired temples; slim-spired <i>chedi</i> topped by a lotus bud	Graceful poses, often depicted ‘walking’, no anatomical human detail.	Sukhothai Historical Park, Sukhothai
Ayuthaya Period (14th–18th Centuries)	Classical Thai temple with three-tiered roof and gable flourishes; bell-shaped <i>chedi</i> with tapering spire	Ayuthaya-era king, wearing a gem-studded crown and royal regalia.	Ayuthaya Historical Park, Ayuthaya
Bangkok-Ratanakosin Period (19th Century)	Colourful and gilded temple with Western-Thai styles; mosaic-covered <i>chedi</i>	Reviving Ayuthaya style.	Wat Phra Kaew, Wat Pho and Wat Arun, Bangkok

HANDMADE ART

Thailand has a long tradition of handicrafts, often regionally and even village specific. Ceramics include the greenish celadon products, red-earth clay pots of Dan Kwian, and central Thailand's *ben-jà-rong* or 'five-colour' style. *Ben-jà-rong* is based on Chinese patterns while celadon is of Thai origin.

Northern Thailand has long produced regionally distinctive lacquerware thanks to the influence of Burmese artisans.

Each region in Thailand has its own silk-weaving style. In ancient times woven textiles might have functioned much like business cards do today – demarcating tribal identity and sometimes even marriage status. Today, village weaving traditions continue but have become less geographically specific.

moved towards a stark functionalism – the average building looked like a giant egg carton turned on its side. When Thai architects began experimenting with form over function during the building boom of the mid-1980s, the result was high-tech designs such as ML Sumet Jumsai's famous 'Robot Building' on Th Sathon Tai in Bangkok. Rangsan Torsuwan, a graduate of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), introduced the neoclassic (or neo-Thai) style.

Traditional Painting & Sculpture

Thailand's artistic repository remains mainly in the temples where Buddha sculptures and murals communicate a visual language of the religion. These Buddha images trace Thailand's historical and artistic evolution from a conquered backwater to a sovereign nation. The period when the country first defined its own artistic style was during the Sukhothai era, famous for its graceful and serene Buddha figures.

Temple murals are the main form of ancient Thai art. Always instructional in intent, murals often depict the *jataka* (stories of the Buddha's past lives) and the Thai version of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. Lacking the durability of other art forms, pre-20th-century religious painting is limited to very few surviving examples. The earliest examples are found at Ayutthaya's Wat Ratburana but Bangkok has some of the best surviving examples.

The development of Thai religious art and architecture is broken into different periods or schools defined by the patronage of the ruling capital. The best examples of a period's characteristics are seen in the variations of the *chedi* shape and in the features of the Buddha sculptures. The works from the various artistic periods differ in the depiction of Buddha's facial features, the top flourish on the head, the dress and the position of the feet in meditation.

Contemporary Art

Adapting traditional themes to the secular canvas began around the turn of the 20th century as Western influence surged in the region. In general, Thai painting favours abstraction over realism and continues to preserve the one-dimensional perspective of traditional mural paintings. There are two major trends in Thai art: the updating of religious themes and tongue-in-cheek social commentary. Some artists overlap the two.

Italian Corrado Feroci is often credited as the father of modern Thai art. He was first invited to Thailand by Rama VI in 1923 and built Bangkok's Democracy Monument and other monuments in Bangkok.

In the 1970s Thai artists tackled the modernisation of Buddhist themes through abstract expressionism. Leading works in this genre include the colourful surrealism of Pichai Nirand and the mystical pen-and-ink drawings of Thawan Duchanee. Receiving more exposure overseas than

Recommended Arts Reading

- » *The Thai House: History and Evolution* (2002; Ruethai Chai-chongrak)
- » *The Arts of Thailand* (1998; Steve Van Beek)
- » *Flavours: Thai Contemporary Art* (2005; Steven Pettifor)
- » *Bangkok Design: Thai Ideas in Textiles & Furniture* (2006; Brian Mertens)
- » *Buddhist Temples of Thailand: A Visual Journey Through Thailand's 40 Most Historic Wats* (2010; Joe Cummings)

Art Museums & Galleries

- » National Museum, Bangkok
- » Bangkok Art and Culture Centre
- » 100 Tonson Gallery, Bangkok
- » H Gallery, Bangkok
- » Kathmandu Photo Gallery, Bangkok

at home, the work of Montien Boonma uses the ingredients of Buddhist merit-making, such as gold leaf, bells and candle wax, to create pieces.

Politically motivated artwork defines a parallel movement in Thai contemporary art. In Thailand's rapidly industrialising society, many artists watched as rice fields became factories, the forests became asphalt and the spoils went to the politically connected. Mani Sriwanichpoom is best known for his Pink Man on Tour series, in which he depicted artist Sompong Thawee in a pink suit with a pink shopping cart amid Thailand's most iconic attractions. Vasan Siththiket is more blatantly controversial and uses mixed-media installations to condemn the players he views as corrupt. His works have been banned in Thailand and criticised as anti-Thai.

In the 1990s there was a push to move art out of museums and into public spaces. An artist and art organiser, Navin Rawanchaikul started his 'in-the-streets' collaborations in his hometown of Chiang Mai and then moved his ideas to Bangkok where he filled the city's taxi cabs with art installations, a show that literally went on the road. His other works have a way with words, such as the mixed-media piece *We Are the Children of Rice (Wine)* (2002) and his rage against the commercialisation of museums in his epic painting entitled *Super (M)art Bangkok Survivors* (2004). This piece was inspired by the struggles of the Thai art community, which protested against the efforts to turn the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre into a shopping 'experience' instead of a museum.

Thai sculpture is often considered to be the strongest of the contemporary arts. Khien Yimsiri creates elegant human and mythical forms out of bronze. Manop Suwanpinta moulds the human anatomy into fantastic shapes that often intersect with technological features, such as hinged faces that open to reveal inanimate content. Kamin Lertchaiprasert explores the subject of spirituality and daily life in his sculptures, which often include a small army of papier-mâché figures. His *Ngern Nang* (Sitting Money) installation included a series of figures made from discarded paper bills from the national bank embellished with poetic instructions on life and love.

Music

Throughout Thailand you'll find a diversity of musical genres and styles, from the serene court music that accompanies classical dance-drama to the chest-thumping house music played at dance clubs.

Classical Music

The classical orchestra is called the *bèe pàht* and was originally developed to accompany classical dance-drama and shadow theatre, but these days can be heard in straightforward performances at temple fairs and tourist attractions. The ensemble can include from five to more than 20 players. Prior to a performance the players offer incense and flowers to the *dà-pohn*.

The standard Thai scale divides the eight-note octave into seven full-tone intervals, with no semitones. Thai scales were first transcribed by the

TRADITIONAL INSTRUMENTS

- » *bèe* – high-pitched woodwind, often heard at Thai-boxing matches
- » *rà-nàht èhk* – bamboo-keyed percussion that resembles a xylophone
- » *kórng wong yài* – tuned gongs arranged in a semicircle
- » *dà-pohn (tohn)* – a double-headed hand-drum
- » *pín* – four-stringed instrument plucked like a guitar
- » *sor* – slender bowed instrument with a coconut-shell soundbox
- » *klòo-i* – wooden flute

Thai-German composer Peter Feit (also known by his Thai name, Phra Chen Duriyang), who composed Thailand's national anthem in 1932.

Lôok Tûng & Mõr Lam

The bestselling modern musical genre in Thailand is *lôok tûng* (literally 'children of the fields'), which dates to the 1940s. Analogous to country and western music in the USA, it's a genre that appeals to working-class Thais. Subject matter almost always cleaves to tales of lost love, tragic early death, and the dire circumstances of farmers who work day in and day out and are still in debt. The plaintive singing style ranges from sentimentality to anguish and singers are often backed by Las Vegas-style showgirl dancers.

Mõr lam is Thailand's blues; it's a folk tradition firmly rooted in the northeast of Thailand and is based on the songs played on the Lao-Isan *kaan* (a wind instrument devised of a double row of bamboo-like reeds fitted into a hardwood soundbox). The oldest style is most likely to be heard at a village gathering and has a simple but insistent bass beat and is often sung in Isan dialect. It has traditionally had a 'country bumpkin' image, but *mõr lam* has jumped the generational fence and now has an electrified pop version and seriously silly side.

As economic migrants from across the country have moved to Bangkok, the two genres have begun to merge. Contemporary singers regularly cross from one style to another with a few songs in between.

Thailand's most famous *lôok tûng* singer was Pumpuang Duangjan, who received a royally sponsored cremation when she died in 1992 and a major shrine at Suphanburi's Wat Thapkradan. Gravelly voiced Siriporn Ampaipong helped carry the tradition afterwards and is still beloved. The new *lôok tûng* princess is Tai Orathai, a college graduate who can vibrate those dramatic notes with rivers of feeling.

Jintara Poonlarp is a current fixture in the constellation; she's quite nouveau with a trendy haircut and Bangkok-style fashions instead of the farm-girl look. Mike Pironpon excels with the oh-so-sad ballads and Rock Salaeng puts the rock-and-roll in *lôok tûng*.

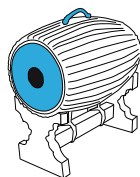
Thai Rock & Pop

The 1970s ushered in the politically conscious folk rock of the USA and Europe, which the Thais dubbed *pleng pêu-a chee-wít* ('songs for life'). Chiefly identified with the Thai band Caravan, this style defined a major contemporary shift in Thai music. Songs of this nature have political and environmental topics rather than the usual love themes. During the authoritarian dictatorships of the '70s many of Caravan's songs were officially banned. Another longstanding example of this style, Carabao mixed in rock and heavy metal and spawned a whole generation of imitators.

Thailand also has a thriving teen-pop industry – sometimes referred to as T-pop – centred on artists chosen for their good looks, which often means they are half-Thai, half-*fa-ràng* and sport English names. Thailand's king of pop is Thongchai 'Bird' McIntyre (also known as Pi Bird). His first album came out in 1986 and he has followed up with an album almost every year since. With Madonna's staying power coupled with a nice-guy persona, he is very popular with Thais in their 30s and 40s.

The current crop of pop stars are imitating Korean pop stars (Japan pop, or J-pop, is out). Girly Berry is a group of attractive, young songstresses with a signature dance move (see it on YouTube), essential for pop groups.

The 1990s gave birth to an alternative pop scene – known as 'indie' – pioneered by the independent record label Bakery Music. During indie's heyday, Modern Dog, composed of four Chulalongkorn University graduates, orchestrated the generation's musical coming of age. Another indie fixture was Loso (from 'low society' as opposed to 'hi-so' or socialites), which



dâ-pohn
(*tohn*)



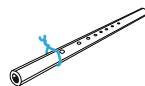
rá-nâht èhk



bèe



sor



klòo-i



kórng wong
yài

LOOKING FOR LIVE MUSIC?

Bangkok is the source for a nightly dose of live music with clubs specialising in cover bands, jazz and rock jam sessions and DJ spin scenes. The Hua Hin Jazz Festival is a well-regarded affair and the Pattaya International Music Festival recruits domestic and international talent. Pai has hosted a reggae festival that complements the town's hip-pie-haven reputation. Chiang Mai has a small collection of live-music venues, including a cosy 'songs-for-life' club that was once the mainstay of the musical scene.

Music Sources

- » E Thai Music (www.ethaimusic.com) is an online music store with transliterated lyrics
- » 365 Jukebox (www.365jukebox.com) tracks popular hits on Thai radio stations, including Fat FM 104.5 (alt-rock), Seed FM 97.5 (T-pop), and Luk Thung FM95.0 (*lòk tǔng* and *mǎr lam*)

Thailand Playlist

- » *That Song* (Modern Dog)
- » *The Sound of Siam: Leftfield Luk Thung, Jazz & Molam in Thailand 1964-1975* (Soundway Records compilation)
- » *Made in Thailand* (Carabao)
- » *Best* (Pumpuang Duangjan)
- » *Romantic Comedy* (Apartment Khunpa)

updated Carabao's affinity for Thai folk melodies and rhythms. But the past decade has moved these bands into 'classic' rock status and Bakery Music was bought by a conglomerate. The alt scene lives on in Abuse the Youth, Class A Cigarettes, Slur, Tattoo Colour and Apartment Khunpa and a host of bands influenced by punk, reggae and other international genres.

The revived disco sound of Groove Riders has brought down the tempo but upped the funky factor. Their hit 'Disco' has become a wedding-song staple. Hugo Chakrabongse was a popular Thai TV actor and minor royal when he gave it all up for music. He has since resurfaced in the US as a songwriter for Beyoncé and was recently signed to Jay-Z's record label.

Dance & Theatre

Thailand's high arts have been in decline since the palace transitioned from a cloistered community. Some of the endangered art forms have been salvaged and revived. Folk traditions have a broader appeal, though the era of village stage shows is long gone.

Thailand's most famous dance-drama is *kǒhn*, which depicts the *Ramakian*, the Thai version of India's *Ramayana*. Dancers wear elaborate costumes and some characters are masked. The central story revolves around Prince Rama's search for his beloved Princess Sita, who has been abducted by the evil 10-headed demon Ravana and taken to the island of Lanka.

Every region has its own traditional dance style performed at temple fairs and provincial parades. School-aged children often take traditional Thai dance lessons. Occasionally temples will also provide shrine dancers, who are commissioned by merit-makers to perform.

Most often performed at Buddhist festivals, *lí-gair* is a gaudy, raucous theatrical art form thought to have descended from drama rituals brought to southern Thailand by Arab and Malay traders. It contains a colourful mix of folk and classical music, outrageous costumes, melodrama, slapstick comedy, sexual innuendo and up-to-date commentary.

Puppet theatre also enjoyed royal and common patronage. *Lá-kon lék* (little theatre) used marionettes of varying sizes for court performances similar to *kǒhn*. Two to three puppet masters are required to manipulate the metre-high puppets by means of wires attached to long poles. Stories are drawn from Thai folk tales, particularly *Phra Aphaimani*, and occasionally from the *Ramakian*.

Shadow-puppet theatre – in which two-dimensional figures are manipulated between a cloth screen and a light source at night-time performances – has been a Southeast Asian tradition for perhaps five centuries originally brought to the Malay Peninsula by Middle Eastern traders. In Thailand it is mostly found in the south. As in Malaysia and Indonesia, shadow puppets in Thailand are carved from dried buffalo or cow hides (*nǎng*).

Cinema

When it comes to Thai cinema, there are usually two concurrent streams: the movies that are financially successful and the movies that are considered cinematically meritorious. Only occasionally do these overlap.

Popular Thai cinema ballooned in the 1960s and '70s, especially when the government levied a tax on Hollywood imports thus spawning a home-grown industry. The majority of films were cheap action flicks that were often dubbed *nám nôw* (stinking water), but the fantastic, even nonsensical, plots and rich colours left a lasting impression on modern-day Thai filmmakers, who have inserted these elements into modern contexts.

Thai cinema graduated into international film circles in the late '90s early '00s, thanks in part to director Pen-Ek Ratanaruang and his gritty and engrossing films, including *Ruang Rak Noi Nid Mahasan* (Last Life in the Universe; 2003). Apichatpong Weerasethakul is Thailand's leading *cinéma-vérité* director and continues to receive accolades at Cannes, most recently winning the Palme d'Or for *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010).

Thai cinema remains largely escapist fare though there are oftentimes sociological commentaries rather than overt political messages. A film-festival favourite, *Mundane History* (Jao Nok Krajok; 2009), directed by up-and-comer Anocha Suwichakornpong, is a family drama about a paralysed man and his friendship with his male nurse. The plot is nonlinear and a critique of Thailand's stratified society. Other trends in Thai cinema include movies dealing with homosexuality, including the critically acclaimed *The Love of Siam* (Rak Haeng Siam; 2009), directed by Chukiat Sakveerakul, which was Thailand's submission to the Oscars that year.

The big studios like to back ghost stories, horror flicks, historic epics, sappy love stories and camp comedies. Elaborate historical movies serve a dual purpose: making money and promoting national identity. Criticised as a propaganda tool, the *Legend of King Naresuan* epic, which comprises four instalments, focuses on the Ayuthaya-era king who repelled an attempted Burmese invasion. Each chapter (three have been released so far) has been a box-office winner.

Despite more daring storytelling, Thai cinema censors are still dedicated to their jobs and often ban or cut out scenes that contain objectionable subject matter. In 2007 the film board introduced a rating system (five levels indicated by appropriate age of viewer) that takes some of the guesswork out of what is allowed.

Literature

The written word has a long history in Thailand, dating back to the 11th or 12th century when the first Thai script was fashioned from an older Mon alphabet. The 30,000-line *Phra Aphaimani*, composed by poet Sunthorn Phu in the late 18th century, is Thailand's most famous classical literary work. Like many of its epic predecessors around the world, it tells the story of an exiled prince who must complete an odyssey of love and war before returning to his kingdom in victory.

Of all classical Thai literature, however, *Ramakian* is the most pervasive and influential in Thai culture. The Indian source, *Ramayana*, came to Thailand with the Khmers 900 years ago, first appearing as stone reliefs on Prasat Hin Phimai and other Angkor temples in the northeast. Eventually the Thais developed their own version of the epic, which was first written down during the reign of Rama I. This version contained 60,000 stanzas and was a quarter longer than the Sanskrit original.

Although the main themes remained the same, the Thais embroidered the *Ramayana* with more biographical detail on arch-villain Ravana (called Thotsakan, or '10-necked' in the *Ramakian*) and his wife Montho. Hanuman, the monkey god, differs substantially in the Thai version in his flirtatious nature (in the Hindu version he follows a strict vow of chastity). One of the classic *Ramakian* reliefs at Bangkok's Wat Pho depicts Hanuman clasping a maiden's bared breast as if it were an apple.

Thai Movies

- » *Fun Bar Karaoke* (1997), directed by Pen-Ek Ratanaruang
- » *Yam Yasothon* (2005), directed by Petchtai Wongkamlao
- » *Fah Talai Jone* (Tears of the Black Tiger; 2000), directed by Wisit Sasanatieng
- » *Mekhong Sipha Kham Deuan Sip-et* (Mekong Full Moon Party; 2002), directed by Jira Malikul

Recommended Fiction

- » *The Lioness in Bloom: Modern Thai Fiction about Women* (translated by Susan Fulop Kepner)
- » *Four Reigns* (Kukrit Pramoj)
- » *Bangkok 8* (John Burdett)
- » *Fieldwork: A Novel* (Mischa Berlinski)



Eating in Thailand

There's an entire universe of amazing dishes once you get beyond 'pad thai' and green curry, and for many visitors food is one of the main reasons for choosing Thailand as a destination. Even more remarkable, however, is the love for Thai food among the locals: Thais become just as excited as tourists when faced with a bowl of well-prepared noodles or when seated at a renowned hawker stall. This unabashed enthusiasm for eating, not to mention an abundance of fascinating ingredients and influences, has generated one of the most fun and diverse food scenes anywhere in the world.

Kids may have a problem adjusting to Thai food; see the boxed text, p46 for some information on how to deal with this.

The Four Flavours

Simply put, sweet, sour, salty and spicy are the parameters that define Thai food, and although many associate the cuisine with spiciness, virtually every dish is an exercise in balancing these four tastes. This balance might be obtained by a squeeze of lime juice and a glug of fish sauce, or a tablespoon of fermented soybeans and a strategic splash of vinegar. Bitter also factors into many Thai dishes, and often comes from the addition of a vegetable or herb. Regardless of the source, the goal is the same: a favourable balance of four clear, vibrant flavours.

Staples & Specialities

Rice & Noodles

Rice is so central to Thai food culture that the most common term for 'eat' is *gin kôw* (literally, 'consume rice') and one of the most common greetings is *Gin kôw rêu yang?* (Have you consumed rice yet?). To eat is to eat rice, and for most of the country, a meal is not acceptable without this staple.

SOMETHING'S FISHY

Westerners might scoff at the all-too-literal name of this condiment, but for much of Thai cooking, fish sauce is more than just another ingredient, it is the ingredient.

Essentially the liquid obtained from fermented fish, fish sauce takes various guises depending on the region. In northeastern Thailand, discerning diners prefer a thick, pasty mash of fermented freshwater fish and sometimes rice. Elsewhere, where people have access to the sea, fish sauce takes the form of a thin liquid extracted from salted anchovies. In both cases the result is highly pungent, but generally salty (rather than fishy) in taste, and used much the same way as the saltshaker is in the West.

Appon's Thai Food (www.khiewchanta.com) features more than 800 authentic and well-organised Thai recipes – many with helpful audio recordings of their Thai names – written by a native Thai.

NOODLE MIXOLOGY

If you see a steel rack containing four lidded glass bowls or jars on your table, it's proof that the restaurant you're in serves *gǎo-ay dĕe-o* (rice noodle soup). Typically these containers offer four choices: *nám sǎm prĭk* (sliced green chillies in vinegar), *nám blah* (fish sauce), *prĭk bòn* (dried red chilli, flaked or ground to a near powder) and *nám-dahn* (plain white sugar).

In typically Thai fashion, these condiments offer three ways to make the soup hotter – hot and sour, hot and salty, and just plain hot – and one to make it sweet.

The typical noodle-eater will add a teaspoonful of each one of these condiments to the noodle soup, except for the sugar, which in sweet-tooth Bangkok usually rates a full tablespoon. Until you're used to these strong seasonings, we recommend adding them a small bit at a time, tasting the soup along the way to make sure you don't go overboard.

There are many varieties of rice in Thailand and the country has been among the world leaders in rice exports since the 1960s. The highest grade is *kǎw hǎm má-lí* (jasmine rice), a fragrant long grain that is so coveted by neighbouring countries that there is allegedly a steady underground business in smuggling out fresh supplies. Residents of Thailand's north and northeast eat *kǎw nĕe-o*, 'sticky rice', a glutinous short-grained rice that is cooked by steaming, not boiling. In Chinese-style eateries, *kǎw dǎm*, 'boiled rice', a watery porridge sometimes employing brown or purple rice, is a common carb.

Rice is customarily served alongside main dishes like curries, stir-fries or soups, which are lumped together as *gàp kǎw* (with rice). When you order plain rice in a restaurant you use the term *kǎw plàw*, 'plain rice' or *kǎw sǎoay*, 'beautiful rice'.

You'll find four basic kinds of noodle in Thailand. Hardly surprising, given the Thai fixation on rice, is the overwhelming popularity of *sĕn gǎo-ay dĕe-o*, noodles made from rice flour mixed with water to form a paste, which is then steamed to form wide, flat sheets. The sheets are folded and sliced into various widths.

Also made from rice, *kà-nǎm jĕen*, is produced by pushing rice-flour paste through a sieve into boiling water, much the way Italian-style pasta is made. *Kà-nǎm jĕen* is a popular morning market meal that is eaten doused with various spicy curries and topped with a self-selection of fresh and pickled vegetables and herbs.

The third kind of noodle, *bà-mĕe*, is made from wheat flour and egg. It's yellowish in colour and is sold only in fresh bundles.

Finally there's *wún-sĕn*, an almost clear noodle made from mung-bean starch and water. Often sold in dried bunches, *wún-sĕn* (literally 'jelly thread') is prepared by soaking in hot water for a few minutes. The most common use of the noodle is in *yam wún sĕn*, a hot and tangy salad made with lime juice, fresh sliced *prĭk kĕe nǎo* (tiny chillies), shrimp, ground pork and various seasonings.

Curries & Soups

In Thai, *gaang* (it sounds somewhat similar to the English 'gang') is often translated as 'curry', but it actually describes any dish with a lot of liquid and can thus refer to soups (such as *gaang jĕut*) as well as the classic chilli paste-based curries for which Thai cuisine is famous. The preparation of the latter begins with a *krĕu-ang gaang*, created by mashing, pounding and grinding an array of fresh ingredients with a stone mortar and pestle to form an aromatic, extremely pungent-tasting and rather thick paste. Typical ingredients in a *krĕu-ang gaang*

Thailand is the world's leading exporter of rice, and in 2010 exported 9.03 million tonnes of the grain.

Thai Food by David Thompson is widely considered the most authoritative English-language book on Thai cooking. Thompson's latest book, *Thai Street Food*, focuses on less formal street cuisine.

(CON)FUSION CUISINE

A popular dish at restaurants across Thailand is *kôw pàt à-me-rí-gan*, 'American fried rice'. Taking the form of rice fried with ketchup, raisins and peas, sides of ham and deep-fried hot dogs, and topped with a fried egg, the dish is, well, every bit as revolting as it sounds. But at least there's an interesting history behind it: American fried rice apparently dates back to the Vietnam War era, when thousands of US troops were based in northeastern Thailand. A local cook apparently decided to take the ubiquitous 'American Breakfast' (also known as ABF, fried eggs with ham and/or hot dogs, and white bread, typically eaten with ketchup) and make it 'Thai' by frying the various elements with rice.

This culinary cross-pollination is only a recent example of the tendency of Thai cooks to pick and choose from the variety of cuisines at their disposal. Other (significantly more palatable) examples include *gaang mât-sà-màn*, 'Muslim curry'; a now classic blend of Thai and Middle Eastern cooking styles, and the famous *pàt tai*, essentially a blend of Chinese cooking methods and ingredients (frying, rice noodles) with Thai flavours (fish sauce, chilli, tamarind).

include dried chilli, galangal, lemon grass, kaffir lime zest, shallots, garlic, shrimp paste and salt.

Another food celebrity that falls into the soupy category is *dôm yam*, the famous Thai spicy and sour soup. Fuelling the fire beneath *dôm yam*'s often velvety surface are fresh *prik kée nõo* (tiny chillies) or, alternatively, half a teaspoonful of *nám prik pòw* (a roasted chilli paste). Lemon grass, kaffir lime leaf and lime juice give *dôm yam* its characteristic tang.

Stir-Fries & Deep-Fries

The simplest dishes in the Thai culinary repertoire are the various stir-fries (*pàt*), introduced to Thailand by the Chinese, who are world famous for being able to stir-fry a whole banquet in a single wok.

The list of *pàt* dishes seems endless. Many cling to their Chinese roots, such as the ubiquitous *pàt pàk búng fai daang* (morning glory flash-fried with garlic and chilli), while some are Thai-Chinese hybrids, such as *pàt pèt* (literally 'hot stir-fry'), in which the main ingredients, typically meat or fish, are quickly stir-fried with red curry paste.

Tòrt (deep-frying in oil) is mainly reserved for snacks such as *glôo-ay tòrt* (deep-fried bananas) or *pò-pée-a* (egg rolls). An exception is *plah tòrt* (deep-fried fish), which is a common way to prepare fish.

Hot & Tangy Salads

Standing right alongside curries in terms of Thai-ness is the ubiquitous *yam*, a hot and tangy 'salad' typically based around seafood, meat or vegetables.

Lime juice provides the tang, while the abundant use of fresh chilli generates the heat. Most *yam* are served at room temperature or just slightly warmed by any cooked ingredients. The dish functions equally well as part of a meal, or on its own as *gáp glâam*, snack food to accompany a night of boozing.

Perhaps the zenith of this style of cooking is northeastern Thailand's *sôm-dam* (see the boxed text, p741).

Nám Prik

Although they're more home than restaurant food, *nám prik*, spicy chilli-based 'dips', are, for the locals at least, among the most emblematic of all Thai dishes. Typically eaten with rice and steamed or fresh vegetables and herbs, they're also among the most regional of Thai dishes, and

Maintained by a Thai woman living in the US, She Simmers (www.shesimmers.com) is a good source of recipes that cover the basics of Thai cooking.

you could probably pinpoint the province you're in by simply looking at the *nám prík* on offer.

Fruits

Being a tropical country, Thailand excels in the fruit department. *Má-mò-ang* (mangoes) alone come in a dozen varieties that are eaten at different stages of ripeness. Other common fruit include *sáp-pà-rót* (pineapple), *má-lá-gor* (papaya) and *daang moh* (watermelon), all of which are sold from ubiquitous vendor carts and accompanied by a dipping mix of salt, sugar and ground chilli.

Sweets

English-language Thai menus often have a section called 'Desserts', but the concept takes two slightly different forms in Thailand. *Körnng wáhn*, which translates as 'sweet things', are small, rich sweets that often boast a slightly salty flavour. Prime ingredients for *körnng wáhn* include grated coconut, coconut milk, rice flour (from white rice or sticky rice), cooked sticky rice, tapioca, mung-bean starch, boiled taro and various fruits. Egg yolks are a popular ingredient for many *körnng wáhn* – including the ubiquitous *fóy torng* (literally 'golden threads') – probably influenced by Portuguese desserts and pastries introduced during the early Ayuthaya era (see the boxed text, p743).

Thai sweets similar to the European concept of pastries are called *kà-nóm*. Probably the most popular type of *kà-nóm* in Thailand are the bite-sized items wrapped in banana leaves, especially *kôw dôm gà-tí* and *kôw dôm mát*. Both consist of sticky rice grains steamed with *gà-tí* (coconut milk) inside a banana-leaf wrapper to form a solid, almost taffy-like, mass.

Although foreigners don't seem to immediately take to most Thai sweets, two dishes few visitors have trouble with are *rodí*, the backpacker staple 'banana pancakes' slathered with sugar and condensed milk, and *ai-dím gà-tí*, Thai-style coconut ice cream. At more traditional shops, the ice cream is garnished with toppings such as kidney beans or sticky rice, and is a brilliant snack on a sweltering Thai afternoon.

Regional Variations

One particularly unique aspect of Thai food is its regional diversity. Despite having evolved in a relatively small area, Thai cuisine is anything but a single entity, and takes a slightly different form every time it crosses a provincial border.

Central Thai food is the most ubiquitous and refined Thai cuisine, and has been greatly influenced by both royal court cuisine and foreign cooking styles, from Chinese to Malay/Muslim. Sweet and rich flavours rule

Keep up with the ever-changing food scene in Bangkok by following the dining section of CNNGo's Bangkok pages (www.cnn.go.com/bangkok/eat) and BK's restaurant section (<http://bk.asia-city.com/restaurants>).

THE CULT OF SÔM-ĐAM

Green papaya salad, known in Thai as *sôm-đam*, probably has its origins in Laos, but is today one of the most popular dishes in Thailand. It is made by taking strips of green unripe papaya and bruising them in a clay or wood mortar along with garlic, palm sugar, green beans, tomatoes, lime juice, fish sauce and a typically shock-inducing amount of fresh chillies. *Sôm-đam low*, the 'original' version of the dish, employs heartier chunks of papaya, sliced eggplants, salted field crabs, and a thick unpasteurised fish sauce known as *plah ráh*. Far more common in Bangkok is *đam tai*, which includes dried shrimp and peanuts, and is seasoned with bottled fish sauce. In other riffs on the dish, the papaya can be replaced with green mango, cucumber or long beans. Almost always made by women, *sôm-đam* is also primarily enjoyed by women, often as a snack rather than an entire meal – the intense spiciness provides a satisfying mental 'full'.

A THAI PILSNER PRIMER

We relish the look of horror on the faces of Thailand newbies when the waitress casually plunks several cubes of ice into their pilsners. Before you rule this supposed blasphemy out completely, there are a few reasons why we and the Thais actually prefer our beer on the rocks.

First, despite all the alleged accolades displayed on most bottles, Thai beer does not possess the most sophisticated bouquet in the world and is best drunk as cold as possible. Also, if you haven't already noticed, the weather in Thailand is often extremely hot, another reason it makes sense to maintain your beer at maximum chill. And lastly, domestic brews are generally quite high in alcohol and the ice helps to dilute this, preventing dehydration and one of those infamous Beer Chang hangovers the next day. Taking these theories to the extreme, some places in Thailand serve something called *beea wún*, 'jelly beer', beer that has been semi-frozen until it reaches a deliciously slushy and refreshing consistency.

However, a brief warning: it's a painfully obvious sign you've been in Thailand too long if you put ice in your draught Hoegaarden.

in central Thai dishes, which often feature ingredients such as coconut milk, freshwater fish and meats.

Northeastern Thai food is undoubtedly Thailand's most rustic regional cooking style, and is most likely indicative of what the ethnic Tai people have been eating for hundreds, if not thousands of years. Spicy, tart flavours and simple cooking methods such as grilling and soups dominate the northeastern kitchen, in which the predominant carb is sticky rice. Because many northeastern Thais are migratory workers, their cuisine is available in simple stalls in virtually every corner of the country.

The most obscure regional cooking style in Thailand is undoubtedly northern-style cooking. Also based around sticky rice, meat, in particular pork, bitter/hot flavours and deep-frying play important roles in the northern Thai kitchen. Given the north's elevation and climate, northern Thai food is probably the most seasonal of regional Thai cuisines. For more on northern cuisine, see the boxed text, p304.

Southern Thai cooking is arguably the spiciest of Thailand's regional cooking styles. It can also be very salty, and not surprisingly, given the south's coastline, seafood plays a large role. Turmeric provides many southern Thai dishes with a yellow/orange hue, and many southern Thai meals are accompanied by a platter of fresh herbs and vegetables as a way of countering their heat. Thailand's south is also a good place to sample Muslim-Thai cooking, which is probably Thailand's sweetest cuisine.

Drinks

Coffee, Tea & Fruit Drinks

Thais are big coffee drinkers, and good-quality arabica and robusta are cultivated in the hilly areas of northern and southern Thailand. The traditional filtering system is nothing more than a narrow cloth bag attached to a steel handle. This type of coffee is served in a glass, mixed with sugar and sweetened with condensed milk – if you don't want either, be sure to specify *gah-faa dam* (black coffee) followed with *mái sài nám-dahn* (without sugar).

Black tea, both local and imported, is available at the same places that serve real coffee. *Chah tai* derives its characteristic orange-red colour from ground tamarind seed added after curing.

Fruit drinks appear all over Thailand and are an excellent way to rehydrate after water becomes unpalatable. Most *nám pôn-lá-mái* (fruit

Written, photographed and maintained by the author of this chapter, www.austinbushphotography.com/category/foodblog details food and dining in both Bangkok and provincial Thailand.

juices) are served with a touch of sugar and salt and a whole lot of ice. Many foreigners object to the salt, but it serves a metabolic role in helping the body to cope with tropical temperatures.

Beer & Spirits

There are several brands of beer in Thailand, ranging from domestic brands (Singha, Chang, Leo) to foreign-licensed labels (Heineken, Asahi, San Miguel) – all largely indistinguishable in terms of taste and quality. For more on how the Thais drink their beer, see the boxed text, p742.

Domestic rice whisky and rum are favourites of the working class, struggling students and family gatherings as they're more affordable than beer. Once spending money becomes a priority, Thais often upgrade to imported whiskies. These are usually drunk with lots of ice, soda water and a splash of coke. On a night out, buying a whole bottle is the norm in most of Thailand. If you don't finish it, it will simply be kept at the bar until your next visit.

Can I Drink the Ice?

Among the most common concerns we hear from first-time visitors to Thailand is about the safety of the country's ice. If it's your first time in Thailand, keep in mind that you are that you're exposing yourself to an entirely different cuisine and a new and unfamiliar family of bacteria and other bugs, so it's virtually inevitable that your body will have a hard time adjusting.

On the good side, in most cases this will mean little more than an upset tummy that might set you back a couple hours. You can avoid more serious setbacks, at least initially, by trying to frequent popular restaurants/vendors where dishes are prepared to order, and only drinking bottled water.

And the ice? We've been lacing our drinks with it for years and have yet to trace it back to any specific discomfort.

Where to Eat & Drink

Prepared food is available just about everywhere in Thailand, and it shouldn't come as a surprise that the locals do much of their eating outside the home. In this regard, as a visitor, you'll fit right in.

MUITO OBRIGADO

Try to imagine a Thai curry without the chillies, *pàt tai* without the peanuts, or papaya salad without the papaya. Many of the ingredients used on a daily basis by Thais are recent introductions courtesy of European traders and missionaries. During the early 16th century, while Spanish and Portuguese explorers were first reaching the shores of Southeast Asia, there was also subsequent expansion and discovery in the Americas. The Portuguese in particular were quick to seize the exciting new products coming from the New World and market them in the East, thus most likely having introduced such modern-day Asian staples as tomatoes, potatoes, corn, lettuce, cabbage, chillies, papayas, guavas, pineapples, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, peanuts and tobacco.

Chillies in particular seem to have struck a chord with Thais, and are thought to have first arrived in Ayuthaya via the Portuguese around 1550. Before their arrival, the natives got their heat from bitter-hot herbs and roots such as ginger and pepper.

And not only did the Portuguese introduce some crucial ingredients to the Thai kitchen, but also some enduring cooking techniques, particularly in the area of sweets. The bright-yellow duck egg and syrup-based treats you see at many Thai markets are direct descendants of Portuguese desserts known as *fios de ovos* ('egg threads') and *ovos moles*. And in the area surrounding Bangkok's Church of Santa Cruz, a former Portuguese enclave, you can still find *kà-nôm fa-ràng*, a bunlike snack baked over coals.

Bangkok's Top 50 Street Food Stalls, by Chawadee Nualkhair, also functions well as a general introduction and guide to Thai-style informal dining.

Thai Hawker Food by Kenny Yee and Catherine Gordon is an illustrated guide to recognising and ordering street food in Thailand.

Thai Food Master (www.thaifood-master.com), maintained by a longtime foreign resident of Thailand, contains helpful step-by-step photos that illustrate the making of a variety of Thai dishes.

Open-air markets and food stalls are among the most popular places where Thais eat. In the mornings stalls selling coffee and Chinese-style doughnuts spring up along busy commuter corridors. At lunchtime, mid-day eaters might grab a plastic chair at yet another stall for a simple stir-fry, or pick up a foam box of noodles to scarf down at the office. In most small towns, night markets often set up in the middle of town with a cluster of vendors, metal tables and chairs, and some shopping as an after-dinner mint.

There are, of course, restaurants (*râhn ah-hâhn*) in Thailand that range from simple food stops to formal affairs. Lunchtime is the right time to point and eat at the *râhn kôw gaang* (rice-and-curry shop), which sells a selection of premade dishes. The more generic *râhn ah-hâhn dahm sàng* (food-to-order shop) can often be recognised by a display of raw ingredients – Chinese kale, tomatoes, chopped pork, fresh or dried fish, noodles, eggplant, spring onions – for a standard repertoire of Thai and Chinese dishes. As the name implies, the cooks attempt to prepare any dish you can name, a slightly more difficult operation if you can't speak Thai.

Vegetarians & Vegans

Vegetarianism isn't a widespread trend in Thailand, but many of the tourist-oriented restaurants cater to vegetarians. That doesn't mean that all Thais are monogamous carnivores; there are, however, home-grown practices of vegetarianism and veganism rooted in a strict interpretation of Buddhism made popular by Bangkok's ex-Governor Chamlong Srimuang. Now there are several nonprofit *râhn ah-hâhn mang-sà-wi-rât* (vegetarian restaurants) in Bangkok (see the boxed text, p121) and several provincial capitals where the food is served buffet-style and is very inexpensive. Dishes are almost always 100% vegan (ie no meat, poultry, fish or fish sauce, dairy or egg products).

During the Vegetarian Festival, celebrated by Chinese Buddhists in October, many restaurants and street stalls in Bangkok, Phuket and in the Chinese business districts of most Thai towns go meatless for one

TASTY TRAVEL

Thailand's cuisine is intensely regional and virtually every town is associated with a specific dish that's unavailable (or at least not as tasty) outside the city limits. To help you look (and eat) like a local, we've listed a few of the more ubiquitous regional specialities:

- » **Ayuthaya:** *gǎo-ay dĕe-o reu-a* ('boat noodles') Rice noodles served with a dark, intense spice-laden broth.
- » **Chiang Mai:** *nám prík nùm* and *kâab mǎo* (roast chilli 'dip' and deep-fried pork crackling) Available at virtually every market in the city, the two dishes go wonderfully together, ideally accompanied by par-boiled veggies and sticky rice.
- » **Hat Yai:** *gài tǎt hâht yài* This city's namesake fried chicken is marinated in a dried-spice mixture, which gives it a distinctive red hue.
- » **Khon Kaen:** *gài yâhng* Marinated free-range chicken (*gài bâhn*) grilled over hot coals – a northeastern speciality said to be best in this town.
- » **Lampang:** *kôw taan* Deep-fried sticky rice cakes drizzled with palm sugar are a popular treat in this northern town.
- » **Nong Khai:** *năam neu-ang* This Vietnamese dish of balls of pork served with rice paper wrappers and a basket of herbs has found a home in northeastern Thailand.
- » **Phetchaburi:** *kôw chăa* This odd but delicious Mon dish of chilled fragrant rice served with sweet/savoury sides is said to be best in this central Thai town.
- » **Trang:** *mǎo yâhng* Roast pig, skin and all, typically eaten as part of a dim sum brunch, is a speciality of this southern town.

BEYOND THE STREET STALL

Read any food magazine article about eating in Thailand, and you will inevitably find gushing references to the glories of the country's street food. While much of the food sold from mobile carts and streetside stalls is indeed very tasty, it certainly isn't the case that *only* street food is good. In fact, in our research, we've found that the best places to eat are anything but mobile, but rather are the long-standing, family-owned restaurants typically found in aged Sino-Portuguese shophouses. The cooks at such places have likely been serving the same dish, or limited repertoire of dishes, for several decades, and really know what they're doing. The food may cost slightly more than on the street, but the setting is usually more comfortable and hygienic, not to mention the fact that you're eating a piece of history. While such restaurants rarely have English-language menus, you can usually point to a picture or dish. If that fails, turn to p785 and practise your Thai.

So do indulge in a street cart or two – they're a fun part of the Thailand experience – but be sure to try a few old-school restaurants as well.

month. Other easy, though less common, venues for vegetarian meals include Indian restaurants, which usually feature a vegetarian section on the menu.

The phrase 'I'm vegetarian' in Thai is *pôm gin jair* (for men) or *dî-chăn gin jair* (for women). Loosely translated this means 'I eat only vegetarian food', which includes no eggs and no dairy products – in other words, total vegan.

Habits & Customs

Like most of Thai culture, eating conventions appear relaxed and informal but are orchestrated by many implied rules.

Whether at home or in a restaurant, Thai meals are always served 'family-style', that is from common serving platters, and the plates appear in whatever order the kitchen can prepare them. When serving yourself from a common platter, put no more than one spoonful onto your plate at a time. Heaping your plate with all 'your' portions at once will look greedy to Thais unfamiliar with Western conventions. Another important factor in a Thai meal is achieving a balance of flavours and textures. Traditionally, the party orders a curry, a steamed or fried fish, a stir-fried vegetable dish and a soup, taking great care to balance cool and hot, sour and sweet, salty and plain.

Originally Thai food was eaten with the fingers, and it still is in certain regions of the kingdom. In the early 1900s, Thais began setting their tables with fork and spoon to affect a 'royal' setting, and it wasn't long before fork-and-spoon dining became the norm in Bangkok and later spread throughout the kingdom. To use these tools the Thai way, use a serving spoon, or alternatively your own, to take a single mouthful of food from a central dish, and ladle it over a portion of your rice. The fork is then used to push the now food-soaked portion of rice back onto the spoon before entering the mouth.

If you're not offered chopsticks, don't ask for them. Thai food is eaten with fork and spoon, not chopsticks. When *fa-ràng* (Westerners) ask for chopsticks to eat Thai food, it only puzzles restaurant proprietors. Chopsticks are reserved for eating Chinese-style food from bowls, or for eating in all-Chinese restaurants. In either case you will be supplied with chopsticks without having to ask. Unlike their counterparts in many Western countries, restaurateurs in Thailand won't assume you don't know how to use them.



The Sex Industry in Thailand

Thailand has had a long and complex relationship with prostitution that persists today. It is also an international sex-tourism destination, a designation that began around the time of the Vietnam War. The industry targeted to foreigners is very visible with red-light districts in Bangkok, Phuket and Pattaya, but there is also a more clandestine domestic sex industry and myriad informal channels of sex-for-hire.

Prostitution is technically illegal in Thailand. However, laws against prostitution are often ambiguous and unenforced, and economic motivations provide a steady supply of workers. Some analysts argue that the high demand for sexual services in Thailand means that there is little likelihood of the industry being curtailed; however, limiting abusive practices within the industry is the goal of activists and government agencies.

It is difficult to determine the number of sex workers in Thailand, the demographics of the industry or its economic strength. This is because there are many indirect forms of prostitution, because the illegality of the industry makes research difficult, and because different organisations use different approaches to collect data. In 2003 measures to legalise prostitution cited the Thai sex industry as being worth \$US4.3 billion (about 3% of GDP), employing roughly 200,000 sex workers. A study conducted in the same year by Thailand's Chulalongkorn University estimated 2.8 million sex workers, of which 1.98 million were adult women, 20,000 were adult men and 800,000 were children, defined as any person under the age of 18.

History & Cultural Attitudes

Prostitution has been widespread in Thailand since long before the country gained a reputation among international sex tourists. Throughout Thai history the practice was accepted and common among many sectors of the society, though it has not always been respected by the society as a whole.

Due to international pressure from the United Nations, prostitution was declared illegal in 1960, though entertainment places (go-go bars, beer bars, massage parlours, karaoke bars and bath houses) are governed by a separate law passed in 1966. These establishments are licensed and can legally provide nonsexual services (such as dancing, massage, a drinking buddy); sexual services occur through these venues but they are not technically the businesses' primary purpose.

With the arrival of the US military forces in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War era, enterprising businesspeople adapted the existing framework to suit foreigners, in turn creating an international sex-tourism industry that persists today.

Created by a sex-workers' advocacy group, This is Us: EMPOWER Foundation National Museum (☑) 2526 8311; 57/60 Th Tiwanon, Nonthaburi; open weekdays) leads visitors through the history and working conditions of sex workers in Thailand.

In 1998 the International Labour Organisation, a United Nations agency, advised Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand, to recognise prostitution as an economic sector and income generator. It is estimated that one-third of the entertainment establishments are registered with the government and the majority pay an informal tax in the form of police bribes. One bar manager we spoke with said that they pay 5000B per month to the police.

Economic Motivations

Regardless of their background, most women in the sex industry are there for financial reasons: many find that sex work is one of the highest paying jobs for their level of (low) education, and they have financial obligations (be it dependents or debts). The most comprehensive data on the economics of sex workers comes from a 1993 survey by Kritaya Archavanitkul. The report found that sex workers made a mean income of 17,000B per month (US\$18 per day), the equivalent of a mid-level civil servant job, a position acquired through advance education and family connections. At the time of her study, most sex workers had not completed high school.

The International Labor Organisation, however, estimates a Thai sex workers' salary at US\$9 a day, or the average wage of a Thai service-industry worker.

These economic factors provide a strong incentive for rural, unskilled women (and to a lesser extent, men) to engage in sex work.

As with many in Thai society, a large percentage of sex workers' wages are remitted back to their home villages to support their families (parents, siblings and children). Khun Kritaya's 1993 report found that between 1800B and 6100B per month were sent back home to rural communities. The remittance-receiving households typically bought durable goods (TVs and washing machines), bigger houses and motorcycles or automobiles. Their wealth displayed their daughters' success in the industry and acted as free inducement for the next generation of sex workers.

Anecdotally, rural families have been known to put pressure on their female children to become prostitutes when debts begin to mount. The bar manager we interviewed said that she tried to return home after a stint as a sex worker in Pattaya but her mother chastised her saying, 'Everyone can do this, so can you.'

Working Conditions

The unintended consequence of prostitution prohibitions is the lawless working environment it creates for women who enter the industry. Sex work becomes the domain of criminal networks that are often involved in other illicit activities and circumvent the laws through bribes and violence.

HIV/AIDS

Thailand was lauded for its rapid and effective response to the AIDS epidemic through an aggressive condom-use campaign in the 1990s. Infection rates of female sex workers declined to 5% by 2007 but rates have recently doubled among informal sex workers (street prostitutes and freelancers). Analysts warn that the country is on the verge of a resurgence as public education efforts have declined and cultural attitudes towards sex have changed. Of the country's 610,000 people living with HIV/AIDS, intravenous drug users make up the largest portion (30% to 50% in 2007).

Organisations working across borders to stop child prostitution include ECPAT (End Child Prostitution & Trafficking; www.ecpat.net) and its Australian affiliate Child Wise (www.childwise.net).

Sex workers are not afforded the rights of other workers: there is no minimum wage; no required vacation, sick leave or break time; no deductions for social security or employee-sponsored health insurance and no legal redress.

Bars can set their own punitive rules that fine a worker if she doesn't smile enough, arrives late or doesn't meet the drink quota. EMPOWER reported that many sex workers will owe money to the bar at the end of the month through these deductions. In effect, these women have to pay to be prostitutes and the fines disguise a pimp relationship.

Through lobbying efforts pro-sex worker groups, such as EMPOWER, hope that lawmakers will recognise all workers at entertainment places (including dish washers and cooks as well as 'working girls') as employees subject to labour and safety protections.

Other commentators (such as the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women; CATW) argue that legalising prostitution is not the answer, because such a move would legitimise a practice that is always going to be dangerous and exploitative for the women involved. Instead, these groups focus on how to enable the women to leave prostitution and make their way into different types of work.

Child Prostitution & Human Trafficking

According to ECPAT (End Child Prostitution & Trafficking), there are currently 30,000 to 40,000 children involved in prostitution, though estimates are unreliable. According to Chulalongkorn University, the number of children may be as high as 800,000.

In 1996 Thailand passed a reform law to address the issue of child prostitution (defined into two-tiers: 15 to 18 years old and under 15). Fines and jail time are assigned to customers, establishment owners and even parents involved in child prostitution (under the old law only prostitutes were culpable.) Many countries also have extraterritorial legislation that allows nationals to be prosecuted in their own country for such crimes committed in Thailand.

Urban job centres such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Pattaya and border towns such as Mae Sai and Mae Sot have large populations of displaced and marginalised people (Burmese immigrants, ethnic hill-tribe members and impoverished rural Thais). Children of these fractured families often turn to street begging, which is often an entryway into prostitution usually through low-level criminal gangs.

Thailand is also a conduit and destination for people trafficking (including children) from Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and China. According to the United Nations, human trafficking is a crime against humanity and involves recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring and receiving a person through force, fraud or coercion for purposes of exploitation. In 2007 the US State Department labelled Thailand as not meeting the minimum standards of prevention of human trafficking.

It is difficult to obtain reliable data about trafficked people, including minors, but a 1997 report on foreign child labour, by Kritaya Archwanitkul, found that there were, 16,423 non-Thai prostitutes working in the country and that 30% were children under the age of 18 (a total of 4900). Other studies estimated that there were 100,000 to 200,000 foreign-born children in the Thai workforce but these figures do not determine the type of work being done.

Responsible travellers can help to stop child-sex tourism by reporting suspicious behaviour on a dedicated hotline (☎1300) or reporting the individual directly to the embassy of the offender's nationality.

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW; www.catwinternational.org) is a non-governmental organization that works internationally to combat prostitution and trafficking in women and children.



Environment & Wildlife

Thailand spans a distance of 1650km from its northern tip to its southern tail, a distance that encompasses 16 latitudinal degrees and a variety of ecological zones, making it one of the most environmentally diverse countries in Southeast Asia.

The Land

Thailand's odd shape is often likened to the head of an elephant with the shaft of the trunk being the Malay peninsula and the head being the northern mountains. Starting at the crown of the country, northern Thailand is dominated by the Dawna-Tenasserim mountain range, a southeast-trending extension of the Himalayan mountains. Dropping into the central region, the topography mellows into rice-producing plains fed by rivers that are as revered as the national monarchy. Thailand's most exalted river is Chao Phraya, which is formed by the northern tributaries of Ping, Wang, Yom and Nan – a lineage as notable as any aristocrat's. The country's early kingdoms emerged around Chao Phraya basin, still the seat of the monarchy today. The river delta is in cultivation for most of the year.

Tracing the contours of Thailand's northern and northeastern border is another celebrated river: Mekong. As the artery of Southeast Asia, Mekong both physically separates and culturally fuses Thailand with its neighbours. It is a workhorse river that has been dammed for hydroelectric power and swells and contracts based on the seasonal rains. In the dry season, riverside farmers plant vegetables in the muddy floodplain, harvesting their crops before the river reclaims its territory.

The landscape of Thailand's northeastern border is occupied by the arid Khorat Plateau rising some 300m above the central plain. This is a hardscrabble land where the rains are meagre, the soil is anaemic and the red dust stains as stubbornly as the betel nut chewed by the ageing grandmothers.

The kingdom's eastern rivers dump their waters into the Gulf of Thailand, a shallow basin off the neighbouring South China Sea. The warm, gentle gulf is an ideal cultivation ground for coral reefs. On the other side of its long slender 'trunk' is the Andaman Sea, a splendid tropical setting of stunning blue waters and dramatic limestone islands. Onshore, the peninsula is dominated by some final remaining stands of rainforest and ever-expanding rubber and palm-oil plantations.

Flora & Fauna

In the northern half of Thailand, most indigenous species are classified zoologically as Indo-Chinese, referring to fauna originating from mainland Asia, while that of the south is generally Sundaic, typical of

Environmental Stats

- Thailand encompasses 514,000 sq km, equal to the size of France.
- Bangkok sits at N14° latitude, level with Madras, Manila, Guatemala City and Khartoum.

Wild National Parks

- » Kaeng Krachan, Phetchaburi Province
- » Western Forest Complex, Kanchanaburi Province
- » Kuiburi National Park, Prachuap Khiri Khan Province

peninsular Malaysia, Sumatra, Borneo and Java. There is also an interesting overlap that provides habitat for plants and animals from both zones starting in Uthai Thani and extending south to the gulf region around Prachuap Khiri Khan.

Thailand is particularly rich in birdlife, with over a thousand recorded resident and migrating species, approximately 10% of the world's bird species. The cool mountains of northern Thailand are populated by montane species and migrants with clear Himalayan affinities such as flycatchers and thrushes. The arid forests of Khao Yai National Park in northeastern Thailand are a favourite for hornbills. Marshland birds prefer the wetlands of the central region, while Sundaic species such as Gurney's Pitta flock to the wetter climate of southern Thailand.

Besides abundant birdlife, visitors to the country's national parks are most likely to spot monkeys. Thailand is home to five species of macaque, four species of the smaller leaf-monkey and three species of gibbons. Although they face the same habitat loss as other native species, monkeys sometimes survive in varying states of domestication with humans. The long-armed gibbons were once raised alongside children in rural villages, and macaques can be found living in small wooded patches or unused temples in population centres.

Other species found in the kingdom's parks and sanctuaries include gaur (Indian bison), banteng (wild cattle), serow (an Asiatic goat-antelope), sambar deer, muntjac (barking deer), mouse deer and tapir – to name a few.

Thailand has six venomous snakes: the common cobra, king cobra, banded krait, green viper, Malayan viper and Russell's pit viper. Although the relatively rare king cobra can reach up to 6m in length, the nation's largest snake is the reticulated python, which can reach a whopping 10m.

The country's many lizard species include two common varieties – *đūk-gaa*, a reclusive and somewhat homely gecko heard in the early evening coughing its name; and *jīng-jòk*, a spirited house lizard that is usually spotted on ceilings and walls chasing after bugs. The black jungle monitor, which looks like a miniature dinosaur, lives in some of the southern forests.

The oceans are home to hundreds of species of coral, and the reefs created by these tiny creatures provide the perfect living conditions for hundreds of species of fish, crustaceans and tiny invertebrates. You can find the world's smallest fish (the 10mm-long goby) and the largest (the 18m-long whale shark), plus reef denizens such as clownfish, parrotfish, wrasse, angelfish, triggerfish and lionfish. Deeper waters are home to grouper, barracuda, sharks, manta rays, marlin and tuna. You might also encounter turtles, whales and dolphins.

Thailand's most famous animals are also its most endangered. The Asian elephant, a smaller cousin to the African elephant, once roamed the forests of Indochina in great herds. But the wild elephant faces extinction due to habitat loss and poaching. The population of wild elephants in Thailand is estimated at about 1000.

Reclusive wild tigers stalk the hinterlands between Thailand and Myanmar but in ever-decreasing numbers. It is difficult to obtain an accurate count but experts estimate that around 200 to 300 wild tigers remain in Thailand. Although tiger hunting and trapping is illegal, poachers continue to kill the cats for the overseas wildlife trade.

The rare dugong (also called manatee or sea cow), once thought extinct in Thailand, survives in a few small pockets around Trang, but is increasingly threatened by habitat loss and the lethal propellers of tourist boats.

The Mekong River rivals the Amazon River in terms of biodiversity and shelters endangered and newly discovered species, such as the Khorat big-mouthed frog, which uses fangs to catch prey.

MEKONG RIVER

The remaining jungles of Thailand can be divided into two forest types: monsoon (with a distinct dry season of three months or more) and rainforest (where rain falls more than nine months per year). The most heavily forested provinces are Chiang Mai and Kanchanaburi.

Monsoon forests in the northern parts of the country are comprised of deciduous trees, which are green and lush during the rainy season but dusty and leafless during the dry season. Teak is one of the most highly valued monsoon forest trees, but it now exists only in limited quantities.

In southern Thailand, where rainfall is plentiful and distributed evenly throughout the year, forests are classified as rainforests with a few areas of monsoon forest. One remarkable plant found in some southern forests is *Rafflesia kerrii*, a squat plant with a huge flower that reaches 80cm across; you can see it at Khao Sok National Park near Surat Thani.

Thailand is home to nearly 75 coastal mangrove species: small salt-tolerant trees that provide an incubator for many coastal fish and animal species. Reforestation programs of mangrove areas have gained in popularity thanks to their protective role in the 2004 Asian tsunami.

Orchids are Thailand's most exquisite native flora. There are over 1100 native species and they cover a variety of habitat: some are ground dwellers, while others anchor high up in trees and still others cling to rocky outcrops.

Queen Sirikit Botanic Garden, outside of Chiang Mai, shelters local and native species, including a beautiful collection of orchids and lotus.

Environmental Issues

Deforestation

Thailand has put enormous pressure on its ecosystems through cultivation of land into cities and farms. Natural forest cover now makes up about 28% of the kingdom's land area as compared to 70% some 50 years ago. The rapid depletion of the country's forests coincided with the shift towards industrialisation, urbanisation and commercial logging. Although these statistics are alarming, forest loss has slowed since the turn of the millennium to about 0.4% per year.

In response to environmental degradation, the Thai government created a large number of protected areas, starting in the 1970s, and set a goal of 40% forest cover by the middle of this century. In 1989 all logging was banned in Thailand following disastrous mudslides in Surat Thani Province that buried villages and killed more than a hundred people.

ENCOUNTERS WITH ELEPHANTS

Thailand's emblematic animal has had many career changes from beast of burden and war machine to tourist attraction. Today visitors can have close encounters with elephants as a mahout-in-training or from a wildlife-viewing platform.

Ban Ta Klang Spend time with elephants and their mahouts in this traditional elephant herding village in northeastern Thailand (p429)

Elephant Nature Park Watch pachyderms enjoy a semi-wild retirement after a lifetime of work at this unique sanctuary, outside Chiang Mai (p253)

Kuiburi National Park Wild elephants congregate in the evenings at salt ponds in this national park, southwest of Hua Hin (see the boxed text, p526)

Elephantstay Programme In the former royal capital, the Ayuthaya Elephant Palace runs a mahout-training program to preserve the ancient tradition (see the boxed text, p164)

Thai Elephant Conservation Center The country's official retirement home for elephants offers an array of educational elephant activities, from one-day visits to mahout training (p307)

Bangkok has been sinking at a rate of 10cm annually and some scientists estimate that the city may face submersion within 20 years due to rising sea levels.

It is now illegal to sell timber felled in the country, but this law is frequently flouted by local populations living near forest complexes and by well-connected interests.

A corollary problem to deforestation is habitat loss. Wildlife experts agree that the greatest danger faced by Thai fauna and flora is neither hunting nor the illegal wildlife trade but habitat loss. Species that are notably extinct in Thailand include the kouprey (a type of wild cattle), Schomburgk's deer and the Javan rhino, but innumerable smaller species have also disappeared with little fanfare.

Flooding

Seasonal flooding is a common natural occurrence in some parts of Thailand due to the nature of the monsoon rains. But the frequency of record-level floods has increased in recent years. In 2010, the rainy season came several months late and transformed reservoirs in Nakhon Ratchasima Province from parched pits into overflowing disaster zones, creating 50-year flood conditions. Swollen rivers and prolonged downpours then extended flooding through the central plains and south all the way to Hat Yai. There were 177 deaths and a massive disaster relief response that lasted for several months after waters subsided. Another record flood occurred in 2006 with 46 affected provinces, mainly in the north, and again in 2008 along Mekong.

In 2011, a two-week period of heavy rainfall several months prior to the start of the rainy season caused flooding in southern Thailand, including the beach resorts. Tourists were stranded until flights and boat

ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE

Thailand is a signatory to the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites), but the country remains an important transport link and marketplace for the global wildlife trade, which is the third-largest black-market activity after drugs and arms dealing. Endangered animals and animal parts are poached from local forests or smuggled from neighbouring countries through Thailand en route to the lucrative markets of China or the US. Despite police efforts, Bangkok's Chatuchak Market contains a clandestine exotic species section.

Though the country's efforts to stop the trade are more impressive than those of its neighbours, corruption and weak laws hinder law enforcement. In 2011, a United Arab Emirates national was arrested at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi airport with a suitcase full of drugged wildlife (leopard and bear cubs and baby gibbons). According to investigators, the smuggler did not possess the suitcase until after he had passed through immigration, suggesting an airport collaborator. Through political connections, the smuggler was released from jail and allowed to leave the country, facing no criminal charges or fines. Even if the case was prosecuted the maximum fines would have been minimal compared to the profit margin on the sale of the animals. Another complicating factor is that Thai law allows the trade of wild species bred in captivity, designed ostensibly to take the pressure off wild populations. Most agree that the real solution isn't harsher penalties but decline in demand. Without buyers, there will be no trade.

On a small scale, several NGOs work on the attendant problems. **WARF** (Wild Animal Rescue Foundation of Thailand; www.warthai.org) was started by a Bangkok housewife who converted her backyard into a makeshift sanctuary for unwanted wild pets some 30 years ago. Today the NGO works with the forestry department on sting operations, job-skills training and educational workshops in Thai public schools. Some of the students who attend WARF workshops have parents who are poachers and WARF hopes that the message of conservation (and maybe even a little environmental peer pressure) will be brought home to those students. With better education and job training, WARF hopes to dissuade future poachers and to turn current poachers into conservationists.

transport could resume. Even worse, months of heavy rainfall followed, and the ensuing devastating floods (also 50-year flood conditions) inundated many parts of Thailand, killing hundreds and affecting tens of millions of people. By late October, the residents of Bangkok were engaged in a desperate struggle to keep as much of the floodwaters out of the city as possible. Despite their efforts, many residential and industrial areas of Bangkok became flooded and as this book went to print, the flooding was not expected to dissipate for four to six weeks. Many refuge centres were set up including at Don Muang airport, which was converted into a tent city.

There are a myriad of suspected reasons for these extreme weather patterns. Many environmental experts attribute human alteration of natural flood barriers and watercourses and deforestation as potential causes. Increased incidents of flooding along Mekong is often linked to upstream infrastructure projects, such as dams and removal of rapids for easier navigation, and increasing human populations along the river that infringe on forested floodplains and wetlands. Another emerging component is the role of climate change in the increase of seasonal rains.

Coastal & Marine Degradation

Thailand's coastal region has experienced higher population and economic growth than the national average and the majority of the country's manufacturing industry is located along the eastern seaboard and the upper Gulf of Thailand. With increased population comes increased environmental pressure.

Soil erosion is a major coastal problem. According to the World Bank, Thailand is losing 2 sq km from its coastline every year. This is in part due to coastal development (construction of jetties, breakwaters, ocean-front hotels and roads), land subsiding (due to groundwater depletion) and to rising sea levels. Accurate data is lacking on coastal water quality but analysts admit that wastewater treatment facilities are outpaced by the area's population and that industrial wastewater is often insufficiently treated.

Coastal degradation puts serious pressure on Thailand's diverse coral reef system and marine environment. It is estimated that about 50% of Thailand's coral reefs are classified as highly threatened, indicating a disproportionate number of dead coral to living coral, according to a World Bank 2006 environmental report. The 2010 global bleaching phenomenon, in which El Nino weather conditions contributed to warmer sea temperatures, exacerbated the health of Thailand's reefs. The Thai government closed to tourism 18 areas in seven marine parks that had experienced widespread bleaching. It is unclear if these reefs, which were 80% affected, will recover.

The overall health of the ocean is further impacted by large-scale fishing, an important part of the Thai economy. Fisheries continue to experience declining catches and an industry once dominated by small family fisherfolk has now shifted to big commercial enterprises that can go into deeper waters and devote more resources to a profitable catch.

The town of Pranburi maintains a thriving fishing industry. Trawlers pull up at the mouth of the river where workers unload their catch and set the fish out to dry on racks spread across town. This think the smell is heavenly.



Survival Guide

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Directory A-Z

Accommodation

Thailand offers a wide variety of accommodation from cheap and basic to pricey and luxurious. Accommodation rates listed in this book are high-season prices. Icons are included to indicate internet access, wi-fi, swimming pools or air-con availability. If there isn't an air-con icon, assume that there's only a fan.

A two-tiered pricing system has been used in this book to determine budget category (budget, midrange, top end). In big cities and beach resorts, rates under 1000B are budget, under 3000B are midrange, with top end over 3000B. For small towns, rates under 600B are budget, under 1500B are midrange and top end over 1500B.

In places where spoken English might be limited, it is

handy to know the following: *hông pát lom* (room with fan) and *hôngg aa* (room with air-con).

Guest Houses

Guest houses are generally the cheapest accommodation in Thailand and can be found all along the backpacker trail. In areas like the northeast and parts of the southeast, guest houses (as well as tourists) are not as widespread.

Rates vary according to facilities and location. In small towns between 150B to 200B are about the cheapest rates around and usually have shared bathroom and a rickety fan. Private facilities, air-con and sometimes a TV can be had for 600B to 800B. But prices are much higher in the beach resorts, where a basic fan room starts at 700B to 800B. Many guest houses make their bread and butter

from their on-site restaurants that serve the classic backpacker fare (banana pancakes and fruit shakes). Although these restaurants are convenient and a good way to meet other travellers, don't measure Thai food based on these dishes.

Most guest houses cultivate a travellers' ambience with friendly knowledgeable staff and book exchanges. But there are also plenty of guest houses with grumpy, disgruntled, clerks who let customers know that they dislike their jobs.

Increasingly, guest houses can handle advance reservations, but due to inconsistent cleanliness and quality it is advisable to always look at a room in person before committing. In tourist centres, if your preferred place is full, there are usually alternatives nearby. Guest houses typically only accept cash payments.

Hotels

In provincial capitals and small towns, the only options are often older Thai-Chinese hotels, once the standard in all of Thailand. Most cater to Thai guests and English is usually limited.

These hotels are multi-storey buildings and might offer a range of rooms from midrange options with private bathrooms, air-con and TV to cheaper ones with shared bath facilities and a fan. In some of the older hotels, the toilets are squats and the 'shower' is a *klong jar* (a large terracotta basin from which you scoop out water for bathing). Although the Thai-Chinese hotels have got tonnes of accidental retro charm, unless the establishment has been recently refurbished, we've found that they are too old and worn to represent good value compared to the guest houses.

In recent years, there has been a push to fill the budget gap for ageing backpackers or young affluent travellers who want the ambience of a guest house with the comforts of a hotel. Now in major

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com/thailand. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

tourist towns, 'flashpacker' hotels have dressed up the utilitarian options of the past with stylish decor and more creature comforts.

International chain hotels can be found in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket and other high-end beach resorts. Many of these upscale resorts incorporate traditional Thai architecture with modern minimalism.

Most top-end hotels and some midrange hotels add a 7% government tax (VAT) and an additional 10% service charge. The additional charges are often referred to as 'plus plus'. A buffet breakfast will often be included in the room rate. If the hotel offers a Western breakfast, it is usually referred to as 'ABF', meaning 'American breakfast'.

Midrange and chain hotels, especially in major tourist destinations, can be booked in advance and some offer internet discounts through their websites or online agents. They also accept most credit cards, but only a few deluxe places accept American Express.

National Parks Accommodation

Most national parks have bungalows or campsites. Bungalows typically sleep as many as 10 people and rates range from 800B to 2000B, depending on the park and the size of the bungalow.

These are popular with extended Thai families who bring enough provisions to survive the Apocalypse. A few parks also have *reu-an tǎa-ou* (longhouses).

Camping is available at many parks for 60B to 90B per night. Some parks rent tents and other sleeping gear, but the condition of the equipment can be poor.

Reservations for all park accommodation must be made in advance through the **central booking system** (☎0 2561 0777; web2.dnp.go.th/parkreserve). Do note that reservations for campsites and bungalows are

handled on different pages within the website.

Business Hours

The following are standard hours for different types of businesses in Thailand. Reviews in this book list only variations from these standards. All government offices and banks are closed on public holidays (see p758).

Banks 9.30am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday; ATMs accessible 24 hours.

Bars 6pm to midnight (officially); closing times vary due to local enforcement of curfew laws; bars close during elections and certain religious public holidays.

Clubs (discos) 8pm to 2am; closing times vary due to local enforcement of curfew laws; clubs close during elections and certain religious public holidays.

Government offices 8.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday; some close for lunch (noon to 1pm), while others are open Saturday (9am to 3pm).

Live-music venues 6pm to 1am; closing times vary due to local enforcement of curfew laws; clubs close during elections and certain religious public holidays.

Restaurants 10am to 10pm; some specialise in morning meals and close by 3pm.

Stores local stores: 10am to 6pm daily; department stores 10am to 8pm daily. In some small towns, local stores close on Sunday.

Customs Regulations

The **customs department** (www.customsclinic.org) maintains a helpful website with specific information about customs regulations. Thailand allows the follow items to enter duty free:

- » reasonable amount of personal effects (clothing and toiletries)
 - » professional instruments
 - » 200 cigarettes
 - » 1L of wine or spirits
- Thailand prohibits the import of the following items:
- » firearms and ammunition (unless registered in advance with the police department)
 - » illegal drugs
 - » pornographic media
- When leaving Thailand, you must obtain an export licence for any antique reproductions or newly cast Buddha images (except personal amulets). Submitting two front-view photos of the object(s), a

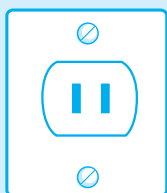
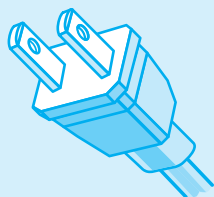
COMMISSION HASSLES

In the popular tourist spots you'll be approached, sometimes surrounded, by touts or transport drivers who get a commission from the guest house for bringing in potential guests. While it is annoying for the traveller, this is an acceptable form of advertising among small-scale businesses in Thailand. As long as you know the drill, everything should work out in your favour. Touts get paid for delivering you to a guest house or hotel (whether you check in or not). Some places refuse to pay commissions so in return the touts will steer customers away from those places (saying it is closed or burned down). In less scrupulous instances, they'll tell you that the commission-paying hotel is the one you requested. If you meet with resistance, call the guest house for a pick-up as they are often aware of aggressive business tactics.

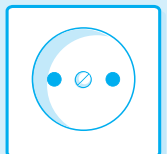
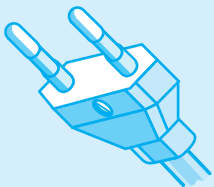
photocopy of your passport, along with the purchase receipt and the object(s) in question, to the **Department of Fine Arts** (☎0 2628 5032). Allow four days for the application and inspection process to be completed.

Electricity

Thailand uses 220V AC electricity; power outlets most commonly feature two-prong round or flat sockets.



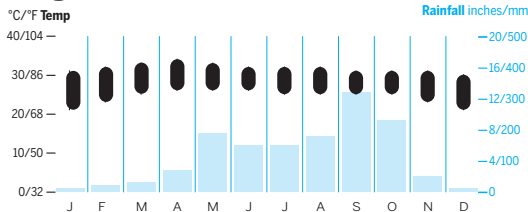
220V/50Hz



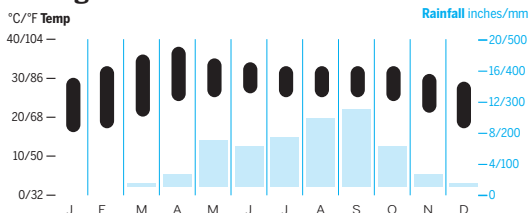
220V/50Hz

Climate

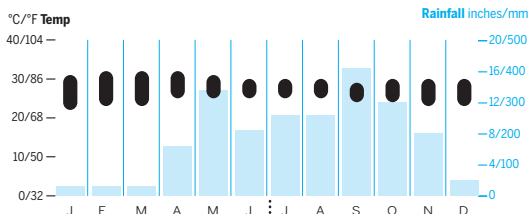
Bangkok



Chiang Mai



Phuket



Embassies & Consulates

Foreign embassies are located in Bangkok; some nations also have consulates in Chiang Mai, Phuket or Pattaya.

Australia (Map p90; ☎0 2344 6300; www.thailand.embassy.gov.au; 37 Th Sathon Tai, Bangkok)

Cambodia (☎0 2957 5851-2; 518/4 Pracha Uthit/Soi Ramkhamhaeng 39, Bangkok)

Canada Bangkok (Map p90; ☎0 2636 0540; www.thailand.gc.ca; 15th fl, Abdulrahim Bldg, 990 Th Phra Ram IV); Chiang Mai Consulate (☎0 5385-0147; 151 Superhighway, Tambon Tahsala)

China Bangkok (☎0 2245 7044; www.chinaembassy.or.th; 57 Th Ratchadaphisek); Chiang Mai Consulate (Map p240;

☎0 5327 6125; 111 Th Chang Lor, Tambon Haiya)

Denmark (Map p90; ☎0 2343 1100; www.ambbangkok.um.dk; 10 Soi 1, Th Sathon Tai, Bangkok) Consulates in Phuket and Pattaya.

France (Map p82; ☎0 2657 5100; www.ambafrance-th.org; 35 Soi 36, Th Charoen Krung); Bangkok Visa & Culture Services (Map p90; ☎0 2627 2150; 29 Th Sathon Tai); Chiang Mai Consulate (Map p240; ☎0 5328 1466; 138 Th Charoen Prathet) Consulates also in Phuket & Surat Thani.

Germany (Map p90; ☎0 2287 9000; www.bangkok.diplo.de; 9 Th Sathon Tai, Bangkok)

India (Map p92; ☎0 2258 0300-6; indianembassy.in.th; 46 Soi Prasanmit/Soi 23, Th Sukhumvit); Bangkok Visa Application Centre (Map p92; ☎02 6652 9681; www.ivac-th.

com; Glass Haus Bldg, 15th fl, suite 1503, Th Sukhumvit); Chiang Mai Consulate (☎0 5324 3066; 33/1 Th Thung Hotel, Wat Gate)

Indonesia (Map p86; ☎0 2252 3135; www.kemlu.go.id/bangkok; 600-6002 Th Phetchaburi, Bangkok)

Ireland (Map p90; ☎0 2677 7500; www.irelandinthaailand.com; 28th fl, Q House, Th Sathon Tai, Bangkok) Consulate only; the nearest Irish embassy is in Kuala Lumpur.

Israel (Map p92; ☎0 2204 9200; bangkok.mfa.gov.il; Ocean Tower 2, 25th fl, 25 Soi 19, Th Sukhumvit, Bangkok)

Japan Bangkok (Map p90; ☎0 2207 8500; www.th.emb-japan.go.jp; 177 Th Withayu/Wireless Rd); Chiang Mai Consulate (☎0 5320 3367; 104-107 Airport Business Park, Th Mahidom)

Laos (☎0 2539 6678; www.bkklaembassy.com; 502/1-3 Soi Sahakarnpramoon, Pracha Uthit/Soi 39, Th Ramkhamhaeng, Bangkok)

Malaysia (Map p90; ☎0 2629 6800; 35 Th Sathon Tai, Bangkok) Also has a consulate in Songkhla.

Myanmar (Burma; Map p82; ☎0 2233 2237; www.mofa.gov.mm; 132 Th Sathon Neua, Bangkok)

Nepal (☎0 2391 7240; www.immi.gov.np; 189 Soi 71, Th Sukhumvit, Bangkok)

Netherlands (Map p86; ☎0 2309 5200; www.netherlandsembassy.in.th; 15 Soi Tonson, Th Ploenchit, Bangkok)

New Zealand (Map p86; ☎0 2254 2530; www.nzembassy.com; 14th fl, M Thai Tower, All Seasons Pl, 87 Th Withayu/Wireless Rd, Bangkok)

Philippines (Map p92; ☎0 2259 0139; www.philembassy-bangkok.net; 760 Th Sukhumvit, Bangkok)

Russia (Map p82; ☎0 2234 9824 www.thailand.mid.ru; 78 Soi Sap, Th Surawong, Bangkok) Also consulates in Pattaya and Phuket.

Singapore (Map p82; ☎0 2286 2111; www.mfa.gov.sg/

bangkok; 129 Th Sathon Tai, Bangkok)

South Africa (Map p90; ☎0 2659 2900; www.saembangkok.com; 12A fl, M Thai Tower, All Seasons Place, 87 Th Withayu/Wireless Rd, Bangkok)

Spain (Map p92; ☎0 2661 8284; es.embassyinformation.com; 23 fl, Lake Ratchada Office Complex, 193 Th Ratchadaphisek, Bangkok)

Switzerland (Map p86; ☎0 2674 6900; www.eda.admin.ch/bangkok; 35 Th Withayu/Wireless Rd, Bangkok)

UK Bangkok (Map p86; ☎0 2305 8333; ukinthailand.fco.gov.uk; 14 Th Withayu/Wireless Rd); Chiang Mai Consulate (Map p240; ☎0 5326 3015; British Council, 198 Th Bamrungrat) Consulate also in Pattaya.

USA Bangkok (Map p86; ☎0 2205 4049; http://bangkok.usembassy.gov; 95 Th Withayu/Wireless Rd); Chiang Mai Consulate (Map p240; ☎0 5310 7777; 387 Th Wichayanon)

Vietnam (Map p86; ☎0 2251 5836-8; www.vietnamembassy-thailand.org; 83/1 Th Withayu/Wireless Rd, Bangkok)

Gay & Lesbian Travellers

Thai culture is relatively tolerant of both male and female homosexuality. There is a fairly prominent gay and lesbian scene in Bangkok, Pattaya and Phuket. With regard to dress or mannerism, lesbians and gays are generally accepted without comment. However, public displays of affection – whether heterosexual or homosexual – are frowned upon. **Utopia** (www.utopia-asia.com) posts lots of Thailand information for gay and lesbian visitors and publishes a guidebook to the kingdom for homosexuals.

Holidays

Government offices and banks close on the following days.

1 January New Year's Day

February (date varies) Makha Bucha Day, Buddhist holy day

6 April Chakri Day, commemorating the founder of the Chakri dynasty, Rama I

13–14 April Songkran Festival, traditional Thai New Year and water festival

5 May Coronation Day, commemorating the 1946 coronation of HM the King and HM the Queen

1 May Labour Day

May/June (date varies) Visakha Bucha, Buddhist holy day

July (date varies) Asahna Bucha, Buddhist holy day

12 August Queen's Birthday
23 October Chulalongkorn Day

October/November (date varies) Ork Phansaa, the end of Buddhist 'lent'

5 December King's Birthday

10 December Constitution Day

31 December New Year's Eve

Insurance

A travel-insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is a good idea. Policies offer differing medical-expense options. There is a wide variety of policies available, so check the small print. Be sure that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home.

Some policies specifically exclude 'dangerous activities', which can include scuba diving, motorcycling or even trekking. A locally acquired motorcycle licence is not valid under some policies.

You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later make sure you keep all documentation.

Worldwide travel insurance is available at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services. You can buy, extend and claim online anytime

– even if you're already on the road.

See p776 for recommendations on health insurance and p774 for details on vehicle insurance.

Internet Access

You'll find plenty of internet cafes just about everywhere. The going rate is anywhere from 40B to 120B an hour, depending on how much competition there is. Connections tend to be pretty fast and the machines are usually well maintained. Wireless access (wi-fi) is usually available in most hotels and guest houses though staff aren't adept at fixing downed services. Wi-fi signal strength deteriorates in the upper floors of a multistorey building so check to see if your floor has a nearby router.

Legal Matters

In general, Thai police don't hassle foreigners, especially tourists. They generally go out of their way to avoid having to speak English with a foreigner especially regarding minor traffic issues.

One major exception is drugs, which most Thai police view as either a social scourge against which it's their duty to enforce the letter of the law, or an opportunity to make untaxed income via bribes.

If you are arrested for any offence, the police will allow you the opportunity to make a phone call to your embassy or consulate in Thailand, if you have one, or to a friend or relative if not. There's a whole set of legal codes governing the length of time and manner in which you can be detained before being charged or put on trial, but a lot of discretion is left to the police. In the case of foreigners the police are more likely to bend these codes in your favour. However, as with police worldwide, if you don't

PRACTICALITIES

- » *Bangkok Post* and the *Nation* English-language news daily.
- » There are more than 400AM and FM radio stations; short-wave radios can pick up BBC, VOA, Radio Australia, Deutsche Welle and Radio France International.
- » Six VHF TV networks carry Thai programming, plus TrueVision cable with international programming.
- » The main video format is PAL.
- » Thailand follows the international metric system. Gold and silver are weighed in *bàat* (15g).

show respect you will make matters worse.

Thai law does not presume an indicted detainee to be either 'guilty' or 'innocent' but rather a 'suspect', whose guilt or innocence will be decided in court. Trials are usually speedy.

The **tourist police** (☎1155) can be very helpful in cases of arrest. Although they typically have no jurisdiction over the kinds of cases handled by regular cops, they may be able to help with translations or with contacting your embassy. You can call the hotline number 24 hours a day to lodge complaints or to request assistance with regards to personal safety.

Maps

ThinkNet (www.thinknet.co.th) produces high-quality, bilingual city and country maps, including interactive-map CDs. For GPS users in Thailand, most prefer the Garmin units and the associated map products that are accurate and fully routed.

Money

The basic unit of Thai currency is the baht. There are 100 satang in one baht; coins include 25-satang and 50-satang pieces and baht in 1B, 2B, 5B and 10B coins. Older coins have Thai numerals only, while newer coins have

Thai and Arabic numerals. The 2B coin is similar in size to the 1B coin but it is gold in colour. The two satang coins are typically only issued at supermarkets where prices aren't rounded up to the nearest baht.

Paper currency is issued in the following denominations: 20B (green), 50B (blue), 100B (red), 500B (purple) and 1000B (beige).

ATMs & Credit/Debit Cards

Debit and ATM cards issued by a bank in your own country can be used at ATMs around Thailand to withdraw cash (in Thai baht only) directly from your account back home. ATMs are widespread throughout the country and can be relied on for the bulk of your spending cash. You can also use ATMs to buy baht at foreign-exchange booths at some banks.

Thai ATMs now charge a 150B foreign-transaction fee on top of whatever currency conversion and out-of-network fees your home bank charges. That means that ATMs are now a lot more expensive to use than in the past. Before leaving home, shop around for a bank account that has free international ATM usage and reimburses fees incurred at other institution's ATMs.

Aeon is the only bank that we know of in Thailand that doesn't charge the 150B usage fee on foreign accounts

but their distribution of national ATMs is somewhat limited and often located in Big C stores.

Credit cards as well as debit cards can be used for purchases at some shops, hotels and restaurants. The most commonly accepted cards are Visa and MasterCard. American Express is typically only accepted at high-end hotels and restaurants.

To report a lost or stolen credit/debit card, call the following hotlines in Bangkok:

American Express

(☎0 2273 5544)

MasterCard (☎001 800 11887 0663)

Visa (☎001 800 441 3485)

Changing Money

Banks or the rarer private moneychangers offer the best foreign-exchange rates. When buying baht, US dollars are the most accepted currency, followed by British pounds and euros. Most banks charge a commission and duty for each travellers cheque cashed.

Current exchange rates are printed in the *Bangkok Post* and the *Nation* every day, or you can walk into any Thai bank to see a daily rate chart.

See p18 for some information on the cost of travel in Thailand.

Foreign Exchange

As of 2008, visitors must declare arriving or departing with an excess of US\$20,000. There are also certain monetary requirements for foreigners entering Thailand; demonstration of adequate funds varies per visa type but typically does not exceed a traveller's estimated trip budget. Rarely will you be asked to produce such financial evidence, but be aware that such laws do exist. The **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (www.mfa.go.th) can provide more detailed information.

It's legal to open a foreign-currency account at any

commercial bank in Thailand. As long as the funds originate from out of the country, there aren't any restrictions on maintenance or withdrawal.

Tipping

Tipping is not generally expected in Thailand. The exception is loose change from a large restaurant bill; if a meal costs 488B and you pay with a 500B note, some Thais will leave the 12B change. It's not so much a tip as a way of saying 'I'm not so money grubbing as to grab every last baht'.

At many hotel restaurants or other upmarket eateries, a 10% service charge will be added to your bill. When this is the case, tipping is not expected. Bangkok has adopted some standards of tipping, especially in restaurants frequented by foreigners.

Photography

Thais are gadget fans and they readily snap pics with cameras or camera phones. Memory cards for digital cameras are generally widely available in the more popular formats and available in the electronic sections of most shopping malls. In the tourist areas, many internet shops have CD-burning software if you want to offload your pictures. Alternatively, most places have sophisticated enough connections that you can quickly upload digital photos to a remote storage site.

Be considerate when taking photographs of the locals. Learn how to ask politely in Thai and wait for an embarrassed nod. In some of the regularly visited hill-tribe areas be prepared for the photographed subject to ask for money in exchange for a picture. Other hill tribes will not allow you to point a camera at them.

Post

Thailand has a very efficient postal service and local postage is inexpensive. Typical provincial post offices keep the following hours: 8.30am to 4.30pm weekdays and 9am to noon on Saturdays. Larger main post offices in provincial capitals may also be open for a half-day on Sundays.

Most provincial post offices will sell do-it-yourself packing boxes. Don't send cash or other valuables through the mail.

Thailand's poste restante service is generally very reliable, though these days few tourists use it. When you receive mail, you must show your passport and fill out some paperwork.

Safe Travel

Although Thailand is not a dangerous country to visit, it is smart to exercise caution, especially when it comes to dealing with strangers (both Thai and foreigners) and travelling alone. In reality, you are more likely to be ripped off or have a personal possession surreptitiously stolen than you are to be physically harmed.

Assault

Assault of travellers is rare in Thailand, but it does happen. Causing a Thai to 'lose face' (feel public embarrassment or humiliation) can sometimes elicit an inexplicably strong and violent reaction. Oftentimes alcohol is the number one contributor to bad choices and worse outcomes.

Women, especially solo travellers, need to be smart and somewhat sober when interacting with the opposite sex, be they Thai or *fa-ràng*. (foreigner) Opportunists pounce when too many whiskey buckets are involved. Also be aware that an innocent flirtation might convey firmer

intentions to a recipient who does not share your culture's sexual norms.

Border Issues & Hot Spots

Thailand enjoys much better relations with its neighbours and most land borders are fully functional passages for goods and people. However, the ongoing violence in the Deep South (see the boxed text, p596) has made the crossing at Sungai Kolok into Malaysia completely off limits and the entire Muslim-majority provinces (Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat) should be avoided by casual visitors.

Cross-border relations between Thailand and Myanmar have significantly normalised though borders are subject to closing without warning. Borders are usually closed due to news-making events, like Myanmar's 2010 elections, so keeping abreast of current events prior to arriving at the border will prevent potential problems.

The long-contested area at Khao Phra Wihan (known as 'Preah Vihear' in Cambodia), along the Thai-Cambodian border, is still a source of military clashes and should be avoided until a lasting peace is found.

Check with your government's foreign ministry for current travel warnings.

Druggings & Drug Possession

It is illegal to buy, sell or possess opium, heroin, amphetamines, hallucinogenic mushrooms and marijuana in Thailand. Belying Thailand's anything-goes atmosphere are severely strict punishments for possession and trafficking that are not relaxed for foreigners. Possession of drugs can result in at least one year or more of prison time. Drug smuggling – defined as attempting to cross a border with drugs in your possession – carries considerably higher penalties, including execution.

Scams

Thais can be so friendly and laid-back that some visitors are lulled into a false sense of security, making them vulnerable to scams of all kinds. Bangkok is especially good at long-involved frauds that dupe travellers into thinking that they've made a friend and are getting a bargain on highly valuable gem stones (which are actually pretty, sparkling glass).

Follow Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) number-one suggestion to tourists: *Disregard all offers of free shopping or sightseeing help from strangers.* These invariably take a commission from your purchases. See the boxed text, p142, for more information.

Theft & Fraud

Exercise diligence when it comes to your personal belongings. Ensure that your room is securely locked and carry your most important effects (passport, money, credit cards) on your person. Take care when leaving valuables in hotel safes.

Follow the same practice when you're travelling. A locked bag will not prevent theft on a long-haul bus.

When using a credit card, don't let vendors take your credit card out of your sight to run it through the machine. Unscrupulous merchants have been known to rub off three or four or more receipts with one purchase. Sometimes they wait several weeks – even months – between submitting each charge receipt to the bank, so that you can't remember whether you'd been billed by the same vendor more than once.

To avoid losing all of your travel money in an instant, use a credit card that is not directly linked to your bank account back home so that the operator doesn't have access to immediate funds.

Contact the **tourist police** (☎1155) if you have any problems with consumer fraud.

Touts & Commissions

Touting is a longtime tradition in Asia, and while Thailand doesn't have as many touts as, say, India, it has its share. In Bangkok, tük-tük drivers, hotel employees and bar girls often take new arrivals on city tours; these almost always end up in high-pressure sales situations at silk, jewellery or handicraft shops.

Touts also steer customers to certain guest houses that pay a commission. Travel agencies are notorious for talking newly arrived tourists into staying at badly located, overpriced hotels.

Some travel agencies often masquerade as TAT, the government-funded tourist information office. They might put up agents wearing fake TAT badges or have signs that read TAT in big letters to entice travellers into their offices where they can sell them bus and train tickets for a commission. Be aware that the official TAT offices do not make hotel or transport bookings. If such a place offers to do this for you then they are a travel agent not a tourist information office.

When making transport arrangements, talk to several travel agencies to look for the best price, as the commission percentage varies greatly between agents. Also resist any high-sales tactics from an agent trying to sign you up for everything: plane tickets, hotel, tours etc. The most honest Thais are typically very low-key and often sub-par salespeople.

Shopping

Many bargains await you in Thailand but don't go shopping in the company of touts, tour guides or friendly strangers as they will inevitably take a commission on anything you buy, thus driving prices up beyond an acceptable value and creating a nuisance for future visitors.

Antiques

Real Thai antiques are increasingly rare. Today most dealers sell antique reproductions or items from Myanmar. Bangkok and Chiang Mai are the two centres for the antique and reproduction trade.

Real antiques cannot be taken out of Thailand without a permit. No Buddha image, new or old, may be exported without the permission of the Department of Fine Arts. See p756 for information.

Ceramics

Many kinds of hand-thrown pottery, old and new, are available throughout the kingdom. Bangkok is full of modern ceramic designs while Chiang Mai sticks to traditional styles. Ko Kret and Dan Kwian are two traditional pottery villages.

Clothing

Clothes tend to be inexpensive in Thailand but ready-made items are not usually cut to fit Westerners' body types. Increasingly, larger-sized clothes are available in metropolitan malls or tourist centres. Markets sell cheap everyday items and are handy for picking up something when everything else is dirty. For chic clothes, Bangkok and Ko Samui lead the country with design-minded fashions. Finding shoes that fit larger feet is also a problem. The custom of returns is not widely accepted in Thailand, so be sure everything fits before you leave the store.

Thailand has a long sartorial tradition, practised mainly by Thai-Indian Sikh families. But this industry is filled with cut-rate operators and commission-paying scams. Be wary of the quickie 24-hour tailor shops; they often use inferior fabric and have poor workmanship. It's best to ask longtime foreign residents for a recommendation and then go for two or three fittings.

Fake Goods

In Bangkok, Chiang Mai and other tourist centres there's a thriving black-market street trade in fake designer goods. No one pretends they're the real thing, at least not the vendors. Technically it is illegal for these items to be produced and sold and Thailand has often been pressured by intellectual-property enforcement agencies to close down the trade. Rarely does a crackdown by the police last and often the vendors develop more surreptitious means of distribution, further highlighting the contraband character of the goods. In the Patpong market, for example, a vendor might show you a picture of a knock-off watch, you pay for it and they go around the corner to fetch it. They usually come back but you'll wait long enough to wonder.

Furniture

Rattan and hardwood furniture items are often good purchases and can be made to order. Chiang Mai is the country's primary furniture producer with many retail outlets in Bangkok. Due to the ban on teak harvesting and the subsequent exhaustion of recycled teak, 70% of export furniture produced in Thailand is made from parawood, a processed wood

from rubber trees that can no longer be used for latex production.

Gems & Jewellery

Thailand is a leading exporter of gems and ornaments, rivalled only by India and Sri Lanka. Although rough-stone sources in Thailand have decreased dramatically, stones are now imported from Myanmar, Sri Lanka and other countries to be cut, polished and traded.

Although there are a lot of gem and jewellery stores in Thailand, it has become so difficult to dodge the scammers that the country no longer represents a safe and enjoyable place to buy these goods. It is better just to window shop.

Lacquerware

Chiang Mai is known for gold-on-black lacquerware. Lacquerware furniture and decorative items were traditionally made from bamboo and teak but these days mango wood might be used as the base. If the item is top quality, only the frame is bamboo and horse or donkey hairs will be wound round it. With lower-quality lacquerware, the whole object is made from bamboo. The lacquer is then coated over the framework and allowed to dry. After several days it is sanded down with

BARGAINING

If there isn't a sign stating the price for an item then the price is negotiable. Bargaining for nonfood items is common in street markets and some mum-and-dad shops. Prices in department stores, minimarts, 7-Elevens and so forth are fixed.

Thais respect a good haggler. Always let the vendor make the first offer, then ask 'Can you lower the price?'. This usually results in a discount. Now it's your turn to make a counteroffer; always start low but don't bargain at all unless you're serious about buying.

It helps immeasurably to keep the negotiations relaxed and friendly, and always remember to smile. Don't lose your temper or raise your voice as drama is not a good leverage tool.

ash from rice husks, and another coating of lacquer is applied. A high-quality item may have seven layers of lacquer. The piece is then engraved and painted and polished to remove the paint from everywhere except in the engravings. Multicoloured lacquerware is produced by repeated applications.

From start to finish it can take five or six months to produce a high-quality piece of lacquerware, which may have as many as five colours. Flexibility is one characteristic of good lacquerware: a well-made bowl can have its rim squeezed together until the sides meet without suffering damage. The quality and precision of the engraving is another thing to look for.

Textiles

The northeast is famous for *mât-mêe* cloth – a thick cotton or silk fabric woven from tie-dyed threads, similar to Indonesia's *ikat* fabrics. Surin Province is renowned for its *mât-mêe* silk often showcasing colours and geometric patterns inherited from Khmer traditions.

In the north, silks reflect the influence of the Lanna weaving traditions, brought to Chiang Mai and the surrounding mountains by the various Tai tribes.

Fairly nice *bah•dé* (batik) is available in the south in patterns that are more similar to the batik found in Malaysia than in Indonesia.

Each hill tribe has a tradition of embroidery that has been translated into the modern marketplace as bags and jewellery. Much of what you'll find in the marketplaces has been machine made, but there are many NGO cooperatives that help villagers get their handmade goods to the consumers. Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai are filled with handicraft outlets.

Telephone

The telephone country code for Thailand is 066 and is used when calling the country from abroad. All Thai telephone numbers are preceded by a '0' if you're dialling domestically (the '0' is omitted when calling from overseas). After the initial '0', the next three numbers represent the provincial area code, which is now integral to the telephone number. If the initial '0' is followed by an '8', then you're dialling a mobile phone.

International Calls

If you want to call an international number from a telephone in Thailand, you must first dial an international access code plus the country code followed by the subscriber number.

In Thailand, there are various international access codes charging different rates per minute. The standard direct-dial prefix is 001; it is operated by CAT and is considered to have the best sound quality; it connects to the largest number of countries but is also the most expensive. The next best is 007, a prefix operated by TOT with reliable quality and slightly cheaper rates. Economy rates are available with 007, 008 and 009; both of which use Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), with varying but adequate sound quality.

The following are some common international country codes: 061 Australia, 044 UK and 01 US.

Many expats use **DeeDial** (www.deedial.com), a direct-dial service that requires a prepaid account managed through the internet. The cheapest service they offer is the 'ring-back' feature, which circumvents local charges on your phone.

There are also a variety of international phonecards available through **CAT** (www.cthai.com) offering promo-

tional rates of less than 1B per minute.

Dial 0100 for operator-assisted international calls or reverse-charges (collect) call. Alternatively, contact your long-distance carrier for their overseas operator number, a toll-free call, or try 001 9991 2001 from a CAT phone and 01 800 000 120 from a TOT phone.

Mobile Phones

The easiest phone option in Thailand is to acquire a mobile (cell) phone equipped with a local SIM card.

Thailand is on the GSM network and mobile phone providers include AIS, DTAC and True Move.

You have two hand-phone options: you can buy a mobile phone in Thailand at one of the urban shopping malls or phone stores near the markets in provincial towns. Or you can use an imported phone that isn't SIM-locked (and one that supports the GSM network). To get started buy a SIM card of a particular carrier (AIS and DTAC are most popular), which includes an assigned telephone number. Once your phone is SIM-enabled you can buy minutes with prepaid phonecards. SIM cards and refill cards (usually sold in 300B to 500B denominations) can be bought from 7-Elevens throughout the country.

There are various promotions but rates typically hover at around 1B to 2B per minute anywhere in Thailand and between 5B and 9B for international calls. SMS is usually 3B per message, making it the cheapest 'talk' option.

If you don't have access to a private phone you can use a somewhat old-fashioned way to call overseas through a service called Home Country Direct, available at some post offices and CAT centres throughout the country.

Calling overseas through phones in most hotel rooms usually incurs additional surcharges (sometimes

3G HERE WE COME, MAYBE?

Thailand's telecommunications companies and state-owned agencies have been wrangling over the 3G (mobile broadband platform) for so many years that the new-generation technology has since been surpassed by 4G. Thailand is the only Asean country not to have the service despite a huge number of smartphone users. In 2010 and 2011, contracts to operate the services were awarded and then suspended by the courts, approval to import equipment has been delayed and now it looks like 2012 might be the year of 3G, maybe.

as much as 50% over and above the CAT rate); however, sometimes local calls are free or at standard rates. Some guest houses will have a mobile phone or landline that customers can use for a per-minute fee for overseas calls.

There are also a variety of public payphones that use prepaid phonocards for calls (both international and domestic) and, less common, coin-operated pay phones for local calls. Using the public phones can be a bit of a pain: they are typically placed beside busy thoroughfares where traffic noise is a problem.

Time

Thailand's time zone is seven hours ahead of GMT/UTC (London). At government offices and local cinemas, times are often expressed according to the 24-hour clock, e.g. 11pm is written '23.00'.

Toilets

Increasingly, the Asian-style squat toilet is less of the norm in Thailand. There are still specimens in rural places, provincial bus stations, older homes and modest restaurants, but the Western-style toilet is becoming more prevalent and appears wherever foreign tourists can be found.

If you encounter a squat, here's what you should know.

You should straddle the two footpads and face the door. To flush use the plastic bowl to scoop water out of the adjacent basin and pour into the toilet bowl. Some places supply a small pack of toilet paper at the entrance (5B), otherwise bring your own stash or wipe the old-fashioned way with water.

Even in places where sit-down toilets are installed, the septic system may not be designed to take toilet paper. In such cases there will be a waste basket where you're supposed to place used toilet paper and feminine hygiene products. Some modern toilets also come with a small spray hose – Thailand's version of the bidet.

Tourist Information

The government-operated tourist information and promotion service, **Tourism Authority of Thailand** (TAT; www.tourismthailand.org), was founded in 1960 and produces excellent pamphlets on sightseeing, accommodation and transport. TAT's head office is in Bangkok and there are 22 regional offices throughout the country. Check the destination chapters for the TAT office in the towns you're planning to visit.

The following are a few of TAT's overseas information offices; check TAT's website for contact information in

Hong Kong, Taipei, Seoul, Tokyo, Osaka, Fukuoka, Stockholm and Rome.

Australia (☎02 9247 7549; www.thailand.net.au; Level 2, 75 Pitt St, Sydney, NSW 2000)

France (☎01 53 53 47 00; 90 Ave des Champs Élysées, 75008 Paris)

Germany (☎069 138 1390; www.thailandtourismus.de; Bethmannstrasse 58, D-60311, Frankfurt/Main)

Malaysia (☎603 216 23480; www.thaitourism.com.my; Suite 22.01, Level 22, Menara Lion, 165 Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur, 50450)

Singapore (☎65 6235 7901; c/o Royal Thai Embassy, 370 Orchard Rd, 238870)

UK (☎020 7925 2511; www.tourismthailand.co.uk; 3rd fl, Brook House, 98-99 Jermyn St, London SW1Y 6EE)

USA (☎323 461 9814; 1st fl, 611 North Larchmont Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90004)

Travellers with Disabilities

Thailand presents one large, ongoing obstacle course for the mobility impaired. With its high curbs, uneven footpaths and nonstop traffic, Bangkok can be particularly difficult. Many streets must be crossed via pedestrian bridges flanked with steep stairways, while buses and boats don't stop long enough even for the fully abled. Rarely are there any ramps or other access points for wheelchairs.

A number of more expensive top-end hotels make consistent design efforts to provide disabled access to their properties. Other deluxe hotels with high employee-to-guest ratios are usually good about accommodating the mobility impaired by providing staff help where building design fails. For the rest, you're pretty much left to your own resources.

Counter to the prevailing trends, **Worldwide Dive &**

Sail (www.worldwidediveand sail.com) offers live-aboard diving programs for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Some organisations and publications that offer tips on international travel include the following:

Accessible Journeys (www.disabilitytravel.com)

Mobility International USA (www.miusa.org)

Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality (www.sath.org)

Visas

The **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (www.mfa.go.th) oversees immigration and visas issues. Check the website or the nearest Thai embassy or consulate for application procedures and costs.

Tourist Visas & Exemptions

The Thai government allows tourist-visa exemptions for 41 different nationalities, including those from Australia, New Zealand, the USA and most of Europe, to enter the country without a prearranged visa.

For those arriving in the kingdom by air, a 30-day visa is issued without a fee. For those arriving via a land border, the arrival visa is 15 days.

Without proof of an onward ticket and sufficient funds for one's projected stay any visitor can be denied entry, but in practice this is a formality that is rarely checked.

If you plan to stay in Thailand longer than 30 days (or 15 days for land arrivals), you should apply for the 60-day Tourist Visa from a Thai consulate or embassy before your trip. Contact the nearest Thai embassy or consulate to obtain application procedures and determine fees for tourist visas.

Non-Immigrant Visas

The Non-Immigrant Visa is good for 90 days and

is intended for foreigners entering the country for business, study, retirement and extended family visits. There are multiple-entry visas available in this visa class; you're more likely to be granted multiple entries if you apply at a Thai consulate in Europe, the US or Australia than elsewhere. If you plan to apply for a Thai work permit, you'll need to possess a Non-Immigrant Visa first.

Visa Extensions & Renewals

If you decide you want to stay longer than the allotted time, you can extend your visa by applying at any immigration office in Thailand. The usual fee for a visa extension is 1900B. Those issued with a standard stay of 15 or 30 days can extend their stay for seven to 10 days (depending on the immigration office) if the extension is handled before the visa expires. The 60-day tourist visa can be extended by up to 30 days at the discretion of Thai immigration authorities.

Another visa-renewal option is to cross a land border. A new 15-day visa will be issued upon your return and some short-term visitors make a day trip out of the 'visa run'. See the destination chapters for land border information and border formalities.

If you overstay your visa, the usual penalty is a fine of 500B per day, with a 20,000B limit. Fines can be paid at the airport or in advance at an immigration office. If you've overstayed only one day, you don't have to pay. Children under 14 travelling with a parent do not have to pay the penalty.

Foreign residents in Thailand should arrange visa extensions at the immigration office closest to their in-country address.

Volunteering

There are many wonderful volunteering organisations in Thailand that provide meaningful work and cultural engagement. **Volunteer Work Thailand** (www.volunteerworkthailand.org) maintains a database of opportunities. For more information see p37. Also see individual destination chapters.

Women Travellers

Women face relatively few problems in Thailand. With the great amount of respect afforded to women, an equal measure should be returned.

Thai women, especially the younger generation, are showing more skin than in the recent past. That means almost everyone is now

THAILAND'S IMMIGRATION OFFICES

The following are two immigration offices where visa extensions and other formalities can be addressed. Remember to dress in your Sunday best when doing official business in Thailand and do all visa business yourself (don't hire a third party). For all types of visa extensions, bring along two passport-sized photos and one copy each of the photo and visa pages of your passport.

» **Bangkok immigration office** (☎0 2141 9889; Bldg B, Bangkok Government Center, Th Chaeng Wattana; ☎9am-noon & 1-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

» **Chiang Mai immigration office** (Map p236; ☎0 5320 1755-6; Th Mahidon; ☎8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

dressing like a bar girl and you can wear spaghetti strap tops and navel-bearing shirts (if only they were still trendy) without offending Thais' modesty streak. But to be on the safe side, cover up if you're going deep into rural communities. And certainly cover up if visiting temples.

Attacks and rapes are not common in Thailand, but incidents do occur, especially when an attacker observes a vulnerable target: a drunk or solo woman. If you return

home from a bar alone, be sure to have your wits about you. Avoid accepting rides from strangers late at night or travelling around in isolated areas by yourself – common sense stuff that might escape your notice in a new environment filled with hospitable people.

While Bangkok might be a men's paradise to some, foreign women are finding their own Romeos on the Thai beaches. As more couples emerge, more Thai men will

make themselves available. Women who aren't interested in such romantic encounters should not presume that Thai men have merely platonic motives. Frivolous flirting could unintentionally cause a Thai man to feel a loss of face if attention is then diverted to another person and, in some cases where alcohol is involved, the spurned man may become unpleasant or even violent.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/bookings.

Entering the Country

Entry procedures for Thailand, by air or by land, are straightforward: you'll have to show your passport (see p766 for information about visa requirements); and you'll need to present completed arrival and departure cards. Blank arrival and departure cards are usually distributed on the incoming flight or, if arriving by land, can be

picked up at the immigration counter.

You do not have to fill in a customs form on arrival unless you have imported goods to declare. In that case, you can get the proper form from Thai customs officials at your point of entry. See p761 for Thai customs information about minimum funds requirements.

Air

Airports

Bangkok is Thailand's primary international and domestic gateway. There are also smaller airports throughout the country serving domestic and sometimes inter-regional routes.

Suvarnabhumi International Airport (BKK; ☎0 2132 1888) Receives nearly all international flights and most domestic flights. It is located in Samut Prakan – 30km east of Bangkok and 110km from Pattaya. The airport name is pronounced *sù-wan-ná-poom*.

Don Muang Airport (DMK; ☎0 2535 1111) Bangkok's second airport is still used for domestic flights operated by Nok Air and Orient Thai (formerly One-Two-Go). Be aware of this when booking connecting flights on these airlines.

Phuket International Airport (HKT; ☎0 7632 7230) International Asian destinations include Hong Kong, Singapore and Bali on Air Asia. Direct charter flights from Europe are also available.

Chiang Mai International Airport (CNX; www.chiangmaiairportonline.com) International Asian destinations include Kuala Lumpur, Taipei and Singapore.

Airlines

The following airlines fly to and from Bangkok.

Air Asia (☎0 2515 9999; www.airasia.com)

Air Berlin (☎0 2236 9779; www.airberlin.com)

Air Canada (☎0 2670 0400; www.aircanada.com)

Air China (☎0 2634 8991; www.fly-airchina.com)

Air France (☎0 2610 0808; www.airfrance.fr)

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Every form of transport that relies on carbon-based fuel generates CO₂, the main cause of human-induced climate change. Modern travel is dependent on aeroplanes, which might use less fuel per kilometre per person than most cars but travel much greater distances. The altitude at which aircraft emit gases (including CO₂) and particles also contributes to their climate change impact. Many websites offer 'carbon calculators' that allow people to estimate the carbon emissions generated by their journey and, for those who wish to do so, to offset the impact of the greenhouse gases emitted with contributions to portfolios of climate-friendly initiatives throughout the world. Lonely Planet offsets the carbon footprint of all staff and author travel.

Air New Zealand (☎0 2235 8280; www.airnewzealand.com)

Bangkok Airways (☎1771; www.bangkokair.com)

British Airways (☎0 2627 1701; www.britishairways.com)

Cathay Pacific Airways (☎0 2263 0606; www.cathaypacific.com)

China Airlines (☎0 2250 9898; www.china-airlines.com)

Delta Airlines (☎0 2660 6900; www.delta.com)

Emirates (☎0 2664 1040; www.emirates.com)

Eva Air (☎0 2269 6288; www.evaair.com)

Garuda Indonesia (☎0 2679 7371; www.garuda-indonesia.com)

Gulf Air (☎0 2254 7931; www.gulfairco.com)

Japan Airlines (☎0 2649 9520; www.jal.co.jp)

Jetstar Airways (☎0 2267 5125; www.jetstar.com)

KLM-Royal Dutch Airlines (☎0 2610 0800; www.klm.com)

Korean Air (☎0 2620 6900; www.koreanair.com)

Lao Airlines (☎0 2236 9822; www.laoairlines.com)

Lufthansa Airlines (☎0 2264 2400; www.lufthansa.com)

Malaysia Airlines (☎0 2263 0565; www.mas.com.my)

Myanmar Airways International (☎0 2261 5060; www.maair.com)

Nepal Airlines (☎0 2266 7146; www.nepalairlines.com.np)

Orient Thai (☎1126; www.flyorientthai.com)

Philippine Airlines (☎0 2263 0565; www.philippineairlines.com)

Qantas Airways (☎0 2236 2800; www.qantas.com.au)

Royal Brunei Airlines (☎0 2637 5151; www.bruneair.com)

Scandinavian Airlines (☎0 2645 8200; www.flysas.com)

Singapore Airlines (☎0 2353 6000; www.singaporeair.com)

South African Airways (☎0 2635 1410; www.flysaa.com)

Thai Airways International (☎0 2288 7000; www.thaiair.com)

United Airlines (☎0 2353 3939; www.ual.com)

Vietnam Airlines (☎0 2655 4137; www.vietnamair.com.vn)

Tickets

In some cases – when travelling to neighbouring countries or to domestic destinations – it is still convenient to use a travel agent in Thailand. The amount of commission an agent will charge often varies so shop around to gauge the discrepancy in prices. Paying by credit card generally offers protection, because most card issuers provide refunds if you can prove you didn't get what you paid for. Agents who accept only cash should hand over the tickets straightaway and not tell you

to 'come back tomorrow'.

After you've made a booking or paid your deposit, call the airline and confirm that the booking was made.

Air fares during the high season (December to March) can be expensive.

Land

Thailand shares land borders with Laos, Malaysia, Cambodia and Myanmar. Travel between all of these countries can be done by land via sanctioned border crossings. With improved highways, it is also becoming easier to travel from Thailand to China. See p770 for specific border crossing immigration points and transport summaries.

Bus, Car & Motorcycle

Road connections exist between all of Thailand's neighbours, and these routes can be travelled by bus, shared taxi and private car. In some cases, you'll take a bus to the border point, pass through immigration and then pick up another bus or shared taxi on the other side. In other cases, especially when crossing the Malaysian border, the bus will stop for immigration formalities and then continue to its destination across the border.

Train

Thailand's and Malaysia's state railways meet at Butterworth (93km south of the Thai–Malaysian border), which is a transfer point to Penang (by boat) or to Kuala Lumpur and Singapore (by Malaysian train).

There are several border crossings for which you can take a train to the border and then switch to automobile transport on the other side. The Thai–Cambodian border crossing of Aranya Prathet to Poipet and the Thai–Lao crossing of Nong Khai to Vientiane are two examples.

TRAVELLING BY BOAT TO/FROM THAILAND

You can cross into and out of Thailand via public boat from the Andaman coast to the Malaysian island of Langkawi.

All foreign-registered private vessels, skippers and crew must check in with the relevant Thai authorities as soon as possible after entering Thai waters. Although major ports throughout Thailand offer port check-ins, most leisure-boating visitors check in at Phuket, Krabi, Ko Samui, Pranburi or Pattaya. Before departing from Thailand by boat, you must also check out with immigration, customs and the harbourmaster.

Another rail line travels to the Malaysian east coast border town of Sungai Kolok, but because of ongoing violence in Thailand's Deep South we don't recommend this route for travellers.

Border Crossings

CAMBODIA

Cambodian tourist visas are available at the border for US\$20, though some borders charge 1200B. Bring a passport photo and try to avoid some of the runner boys who want to issue a health certificate or other 'medical' paperwork for additional fees.

Aranya Prathet to Poipet (p501) The most direct land route between Bangkok and Angkor Wat.

Hat Lek to Krong Koh Kong (p217) The coastal crossing for travellers heading to/from Ko Chang/Sihanoukville.

Pong Nam Ron to Pailin (p212) A backdoor route from Ko Chang (via Chanthaburi) to Battambang and Angkor Wat. Several more remote crossings include O Smach to Chong Chom (periodically closed due to fighting at Khao Phra Wihan) and Chong Sa to Ngam Choam, but they aren't as convenient as you'll have to hire private transport (instead of a shared taxi) on the Cambodian side of the border.

CHINA

With an increase in infrastructure the interior of southern China is now linked with Laos and northern Thailand, making it possible to travel somewhat directly between the two countries. You'll need to arrange your Chinese visa prior to departure, ideally in Bangkok or Chiang Mai.

It was once also possible to travel overland from the Thai town of Mae Sai through Myanmar and across the border near Mong La to the

BICYCLE TRAVEL IN THAILAND

For travelling just about anywhere outside Bangkok, bicycles are an ideal form of local transport – cheap, nonpolluting and slow moving enough to allow travellers to see everything. Bicycles can be hired in many locations, especially guest houses, for as little as 50B per day, though they aren't always high-quality. A security deposit isn't usually required.

Bicycle touring is also a popular way to see the country, and most roads are sealed and have roomy shoulders. Because duties are high on imported bikes, in most cases you'll do better to bring your own bike to Thailand rather than purchase one here. No special permits are needed for bringing a bicycle into the country, although it may be registered by customs – which means if you don't leave the country with your bicycle, you'll have to pay a customs duty. It's advisable to bring a well-stocked repair kit.

Chinese town of Daluo, but this border has been closed since 2005.

Chiang Khong to Mengla (p333) The China–Thailand highway (Rte 3) was a former opium smuggling trail that has been modernised into a major transnational shipping route. The 1800km of paved road between Kunming, in China's Yunnan Province, to Bangkok is still missing one vital link: the fourth Thai–Lao Friendship Bridge (at Chiang Khong–Huay Xai) across the Mekong River, which is projected to be completed in 2014. Meanwhile the crossing is done by boat and buses leave from the Lao town of Huay Xai.

Chiang Saen to Jinghong (p329) A slow boat travels along the Mekong River from northern Thailand to China's Yunnan Province.

LAOS

It is fairly hassle free to cross into Laos from northern Thailand and northeastern Thailand. Lao visas (US\$30 to US\$42) can be obtained on arrival and applications require a passport photo.

Nong Khai to Vientiane (p468) The first Thai–Lao

Friendship Bridge spans this section of the Mekong River and is the main transport gateway between the two countries. Nong Khai is easily reached by train or bus from Bangkok.

Chiang Khong to Huay Xai (p333) A popular crossing that links northern Thailand and Chiang Mai with Luang Prabang via boat. **Mukdahan to Savannakhet** (p495) The second Thai–Lao Friendship Bridge provides a trilateral link between Thailand, Laos and Vietnam.

Nakhon Phanom to Tha Khaek (p485) The third Thai–Lao Friendship Bridge is scheduled for completion in late 2011.

Chong Mek to Vangtao (p442) On the Thai side, the border is best accessed via Ubon Ratchathani and is a good option for transiting to Pakse (on the Lao side). Remote crossings include Bueng Kan to Paksan (p480; Lao visas must be arranged in advance), Tha Li to Kaen Thao (p473; requires chartered transport) and Ban Huay Kon to Muang Ngeun (p348).

Air-Fares & Train Routes Map



MALAYSIA

Malaysia, especially the west coast, is easy to reach via bus, train and even boat.

Hat Yai to Butterworth

(p595) The western spur of the train line originating in Bangkok terminates at Butterworth, the mainland transfer point to Penang. Less popular these days due to unrest in the Deep South.

Hat Yai to Padang Besar

Buses originate out of the southern transit town of Hat Yai en route to a variety of Malaysian destinations. Border formalities are handled at Padang Besar. Due to continued violence in the Deep South we do not recommend taking this route.

Sungai Kolok to Kota

Bahru (p600) While this border crossing is a possibility, the continued violence in Thailand's Deep South means that we do not recommend this overland route.

Ko Lipe to Langkawi

(p691) Boats provide a convenient high-season link between these two Andaman islands.

Satun-Langkawi/Kuala

Perlis (p692) Boats shuttle from this mainland port to the island of Langkawi and the mainland town of Kuala Perlis.

MYANMAR

Most of the land crossings into Myanmar have restrictions that don't allow full access to the country. Border points are also subject to unannounced closures, which can last anywhere from a day to years.

Mae Sai to Tachileik

(p322) This is the only crossing through which foreigners can travel beyond the border town, although travel is limited and subject to extensive regulations. Interestingly, the bridge that spans the two border towns is Lo Hsing-han's former 'Golden Triangle' passageway for the opium and heroin trade. Many travellers

use this border as a way to renew their Thai visas as it is convenient to Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai.

Ranong to Kawthoung

(p603) This is a popular visa-renewal point in the southern part of Thailand.

Mae Sot to Myawadi

(p375) At the time of research this border was closed. In the event it reopens, this border is only open as a day trip into the Myawadi market.

Three Pagodas Pass

(p190) This crossing has been closed to foreigners since 2006. Prior to its closure, the border was open for day trips to the Burmese border market only and no visa extensions/renewals were issued.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Hopping around the country by air continues to be affordable. Most routes originate from Bangkok, but Chiang Mai, Ko Samui and Phuket all have a few routes to other Thai towns. See the Thai Air-fares map for routes and estimated costs; for airline contact information, see the respective city sections.

THAI operates many domestic air routes from Bangkok to provincial capitals. Bangkok Air is another established domestic carrier. Orient Thai and Nok Air are the domestic budget carriers.

Boat

The true Thai river transport is the *reu-a hāhng yow* (long-tail boat), so-called because the propeller is mounted at the end of a long drive shaft extending from the engine. The long-tail boats are a staple of transport on rivers and canals in Bangkok and neighbouring provinces.

Between the mainland and islands in the Gulf of Thailand or the Andaman Sea, the standard craft is a wooden boat, 8m to 10m long, with an inboard engine, a wheelhouse and a simple roof to shelter passengers and cargo. Faster, more expensive hovercraft or jetfoils are available in tourist areas.

Bus & Minivan

The bus network in Thailand is prolific and reliable, and is a great way to see the countryside and sit among the locals. The Thai government subsidises the Transport Company (*bò-ri-sàt kǒn sǒng*), usually abbreviated to Baw Khaw Saw (BKS). Every city and town in Thailand linked by bus has a BKS station, even if it's just a patch of dirt by the side of the road.

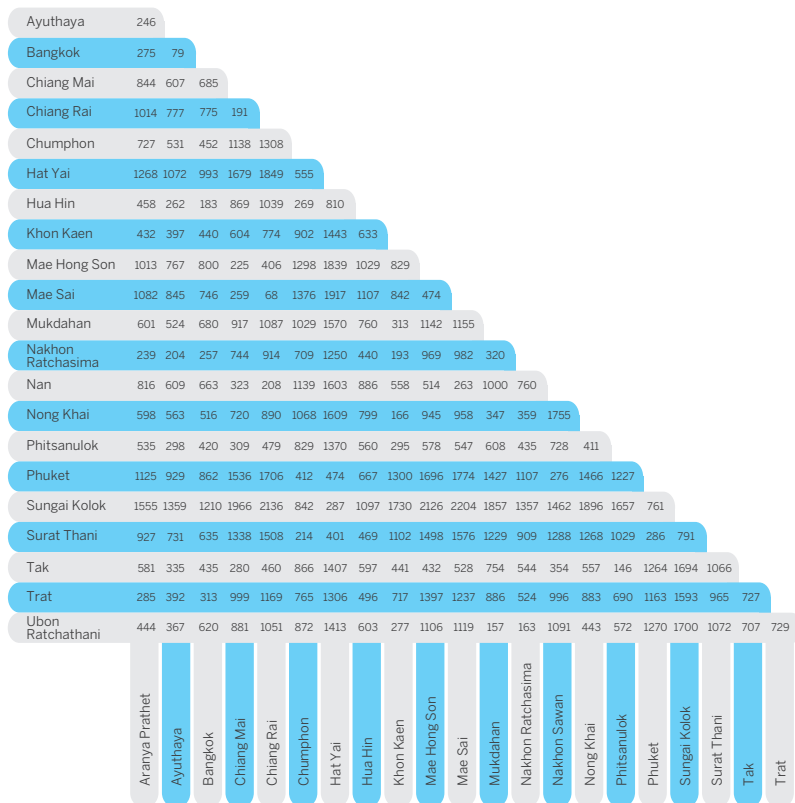
By far the most reliable bus companies in Thailand are the ones that operate out of the government-run BKS stations. In some cases the companies are entirely state owned, in others they are private concessions.

We do not recommend using bus companies that operate directly out of tourist centres, like Bangkok's Th Khao San, because of repeated instances of theft and commission-seeking stops. Be sure to read the Dangers & Annoyances sections in the relevant destination chapters to be aware of bus scams and problems.

Increasingly though, minivans are the middle-class option. Minivans are run by private companies and because their vehicles are smaller they can depart from the market (instead of the out-of-town bus stations) and will deliver guests directly to their hotel. Just don't sit in the front so you don't see the driver's daredevil techniques!

Bus Classes

The cheapest and slowest buses are the *rót*



tam-má-dah (ordinary fan buses) that stop in every little town and for every waving hand along the highway. Only a few of these ordinary buses, in rural locations or for local destinations, still exist since most have been replaced by air-con buses.

The bulk of the bus service is faster, more comfortable air-con buses, called *rót aa* (air bus). Longer routes offer at least two classes of air-con buses: 2nd class and 1st class; the latter have toilets. 'VIP' and 'Super VIP' buses have fewer seats so that each seat reclines further; sometimes these are called *rót norm* (sleeper bus).

It is handy to bring along a jacket, especially for long-

distance trips, as the air-con can make the cabin cold.

The service on these buses is usually quite good and on certain routes sometimes includes a beverage service and video, courtesy of an 'air hostess', a young woman dressed in a polyester uniform.

On overnight journeys the buses usually stop somewhere en route for 'midnight kôw dôm', when passengers are awakened to get off the bus for a free meal of rice soup.

Reservations

You can book air-con BKS buses at any BKS terminal. Ordinary (fan) buses cannot be booked in advance. Privately run buses can be

booked through most hotels or any travel agency, but it's best to book directly through a bus office to be sure that you get what you pay for.

Car & Motorcycle Driving Licence

Short-term visitors who wish to drive vehicles (including motorcycles) in Thailand need an International Driving Permit.

Fuel & Spare Parts

Modern petrol (gasoline) stations are in plentiful supply all over Thailand wherever there are paved roads. In more-remote, off-road areas *ben-sin/nám-man rót yon* (petrol containing benzene)

is usually available at small roadside or village stands. All fuel in Thailand is unleaded, and diesel is used by trucks and some passenger cars. In 2007, Thailand introduced several alternative fuels, including gasohol (a blend of petrol and ethanol that comes in different octane levels, either 91% or 95%) and compressed natural gas, used by taxis with bifuel capabilities. For news and updates about fuel options, and other car talk, see the website of **BKK Auto** (www.bkkautos.com).

Hire & Purchase

Cars, jeeps and vans can be rented in most major cities and airports from local companies as well as international chains. Local companies tend to have cheaper rates than the international chains, but their fleets of cars tend to be older and not as well maintained. Check the tyre treads and general upkeep of the vehicle before committing.

Motorcycles can be rented in major towns and many smaller tourist centres from guest houses and small mum-and-dad businesses. Renting a motorcycle in Thailand is relatively easy and a great way to independently tour the countryside. For daily rentals, most businesses will ask that you leave your passport as a deposit. Before renting a motorcycle, check the vehicle's condition and ask for a helmet (which is required by law).

Many tourists are injured riding motorcycles in Thailand because they don't know how to handle the vehicle and are unfamiliar with road rules and conditions. Drive slowly, especially when roads are slick, to avoid damage to yourself and to the vehicle, and be sure to have adequate health insurance. If you've never driven a motorcycle before, stick to the smaller 100cc step-through bikes with automatic clutches. Remember to distribute weight as evenly as possible

across the frame of the bike to improve handling.

Insurance

Thailand requires a minimum of liability insurance for all registered vehicles on the road. The better hire companies include comprehensive coverage for their vehicles. Always verify that a vehicle is insured for liability before signing a rental contract; you should also ask to see the dated insurance documents. If you have an accident while driving an uninsured vehicle, you're in for some major hassles.

Road Rules & Hazards

Thais drive on the left-hand side of the road (most of the time!). Other than that, just about anything goes, in spite of road signs and speed limits.

The main rule to be aware of is that right of way goes to the bigger vehicle; this is not what it says in the Thai traffic law, but it's the reality. Maximum speed limits are 50km/h on urban roads and 80km/h to 100km/h on most highways – but on any given stretch of highway you'll see various vehicles travelling as slowly as 30km/h and as fast as 150km/h. Speed traps are common along Hwy 4 in the south and Hwy 2 in the northeast.

Indicators are often used to warn passing drivers about oncoming traffic. A flashing left indicator means it's OK to pass, while a right indicator means that someone's approaching from the other direction. Horns are used to tell other vehicles that the driver plans to pass. When drivers flash their lights, they're telling you not to pass.

In Bangkok traffic is chaotic, roads are poorly signposted and motorcycles and random contra flows mean you can suddenly find yourself facing a wall of cars coming the other way.

Outside of the capital, the principal hazard when driv-

ing in Thailand, besides the general disregard for traffic laws, is having to contend with so many different types of vehicles on the same road – trucks, bicycles, *túk-túk* ('pronounced *dúk dúk*; motorised transport) and motorcycles. This danger is often compounded by the lack of working lights. In village areas the vehicular traffic is lighter but you have to contend with stray chickens, dogs and water buffaloes.

Hitching

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country and we don't recommend it. Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. Hitching is rarely seen these days in Thailand, so most passing motorists might not realise the intentions of the foreigner standing on the side of the road with a thumb out. Thais don't 'thumb it'; instead when they want a ride they wave their hand with the palm facing the ground. This is the same gesture used to flag a taxi or bus, which is why some drivers might stop and point to a bus stop if one is nearby.

In some of the national parks where there isn't public transport Thais are often willing to pick up a passenger standing by the side of the road.

Local Transport

City Bus & Sǒng-tǎa-ou

Bangkok has the largest city-bus system in the country, while Udon Thani and a few other provincial capitals have some city bus services. The etiquette for riding public buses is to wait at a bus stop and hail the vehicle by waving your hand palm-side downward. You typically pay the fare once you've taken a seat or, in some cases, when you disembark.

Elsewhere, public transport is provided by *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* (a small pick-up truck outfitted with two facing rows of benches for passengers). They sometimes operate on fixed routes, just like buses, but they may also run a share-taxi service where they pick up passengers going in the same general direction. In tourist centres, *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* can be chartered just like a regular taxi, but you'll need to negotiate the fare beforehand. You can usually hail a *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* anywhere along its route and pay the fare when you disembark.

Depending on the region, *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* might also run a fixed route from the centre of town to outlying areas or even points within the provinces. Sometimes these vehicles are larger six-wheeled vehicles (sometimes called '*rót hòk lór*').

Mass Transit

Bangkok is the only city in Thailand to have an above-ground and underground light-rail public transport system. Known as the Skytrain and the Metro, respectively, both systems have helped to alleviate the capital's notorious traffic jams.

Motorcycle Taxi

Many cities in Thailand have *mor-deu-sai rǎp jǎhng* (100cc to 125cc motorcycles) that can be hired, with a driver, for short distances. If you're empty-handed or travelling with a small bag, they can't be beaten for transport in a pinch.

In most cities, you'll find motorcycle taxis clustered near street intersections, rather than cruising the streets looking for fares. Usually they wear numbered jerseys. Fares tend to run from 10B to 50B, depending on distance and you'll need to establish the price beforehand. The exception is in Bangkok where the soi motorcycle taxis are a standard 10B.

Taxi

Bangkok has the most formal system of metered taxis. In other cities, a taxi can be a private vehicle with negotiable rates. You can also travel between cities by taxi but you'll need to negotiate a price as few taxi drivers will run a meter for intercity travel.

Tours

Many operators around the world can arrange guided tours of Thailand. Most of them simply serve as brokers for tour companies based in Thailand. The better tour companies build their own Thailand itineraries from scratch and choose their local suppliers based on which best serve these itineraries. Many are now offering 'voluntourism' programs, which means that you might buy lunch for an orphanage, visit a hospital or teach an English class in addition to sightseeing. Also see Volunteering (p766) if you're looking for alternative travelling experiences.

Asian Trails (www.asiantrails.info) Tour operator that runs programs for overseas brokers; trips include a mix of

on- and off-the-beaten-path destinations.

Hands Up Holidays (www.handsupholidays.com) Volunteer tourism and village sightseeing programs.

Intrepid Travel (www.intrepidtravel.com) Specialises in small-group travel geared towards young people.

Isan Explorer (www.isanexplorer.com) Custom tours to the northeast.

I-to-I (www.i-to-i.com) Volunteer tourism and gap-year programs.

Mekong Cruises (www.cruisemekong.com) Float down the mighty river aboard an elegant vessel.

Orient Express (www.orient-express.com) High-end luxury tours of common and uncommon places in Thailand.

Spice Roads (www.spiceroads.com) Variety of regional cycling programs.

Tiger Trails (www.tigertrailthailand.com) Nature, culture and strenuous trekking tours around Chiang Mai and northern Thailand.

Tour de Thailand (www.tourdethailand.com) Charity bike ride organiser covering touring routes throughout the country.

SǎHM-LÓR & TÚK-TÚK

Sǎhm-lór are three-wheeled pedicabs that are typically found in small towns where traffic is light and old-fashioned ways persist.

The modern era's version of the human-powered sǎhm-lór is the motorised tók-túk. They're small utility vehicles, powered by screaming engines (usually LPG-powered) and a lot of flash and sparkle.

With either form of transport the fare must be established by bargaining before departure. In tourist centres, tók-túk drivers often grossly overcharge foreigners so have a sense of how much the fare should be before soliciting a ride. Hotel staff are helpful in providing reasonable fare suggestions.

Readers interested in pedicab lore and design may want to have a look at Lonely Planet's hardcover pictorial book, *Chasing Rickshaws*, by Lonely Planet founder Tony Wheeler.

Tours with Kasma Loha-Unchit (www.thaifoodandtravel.com) Thai cookbook author offers personalised 'cultural immersion' tours of Thailand.

Train

Thailand's train system connects the four corners of the country and is most convenient as an alternative to buses for the long journey north to Chiang Mai or south to Surat Thani. The train is also ideal for short trips to Ayuthaya and Lopburi from Bangkok where traffic is a consideration.

The 4500km rail network is operated by the **State Railway of Thailand** (SRT; ☎1690; www.railway.co.th) and covers four main lines: the northern, southern, north-eastern and eastern lines. All long-distance trains originate from Bangkok's Hua Lamphong station.

Classes

The SRT operates passenger trains in three classes – 1st, 2nd and 3rd – but each class varies considerably depending on whether you're on an ordinary, rapid or express train.

First Class – Private cabins define the 1st-class carriages, which are available only on rapid, express and special-express trains.

Second Class – The seating arrangements in a 2nd-class, non-sleeper carriage are similar to those on a bus, with pairs of padded seats, usually recliners, all facing towards the front of the

train. On 2nd-class sleeper cars, pairs of seats face one another and convert into two fold-down berths. The lower berth has more headroom than the upper berth and this is reflected in a higher fare. Children are always assigned a lower berth. Second-class carriages are found only on rapid and express trains. There are air-con and fan 2nd-class carriages.

Third Class – A typical 3rd-class carriage consists of two rows of bench seats divided into facing pairs. Each bench seat is designed to seat two or three passengers, but on a crowded rural line nobody seems to care. Express trains do not carry 3rd-class carriages at all. Commuter trains in the Bangkok area are all 3rd class.

Costs

Fares are determined on a base price with surcharges added for distance, class and train type (special express, express, rapid, ordinary). Extra charges are added if the carriage has air-con and for sleeping berths (either upper or lower).

Reservations

Advance bookings can be made from one to 60 days before your intended date of departure. You can make bookings in person from any train station. Train tickets can also be purchased at travel agencies, which usually add a service charge to the ticket price. If you are planning long-distance train travel from outside the country, you should email the **State Rail-**

way of Thailand (passenger-ser@railway.co.th) at least two weeks before your journey. You will receive an email confirming the booking. Pick up and pay for tickets an hour before leaving at the scheduled departure train station.

It is advisable to make advanced bookings for long-distance sleeper trains between Bangkok and Chiang Mai or from Bangkok to Surat Thani, especially around Songkran in April and peak tourist-season months of December and January.

For short-distance trips you should purchase your ticket at least a day in advance for seats (rather than sleepers).

Partial refunds on tickets are available depending on the number of days prior to your departure you arrange for a cancellation. These arrangements can be handled at the train station booking office.

Station Services

You'll find that all train stations in Thailand have baggage-storage services (or 'cloak rooms'). Most stations have a ticket window that will open between 15 and 30 minutes before train arrivals. There are also newsagents and small snack vendors, but no full-service restaurants.

Most train stations have printed timetables in English; although this isn't always the case for smaller stations. Bangkok's Hua Lamphong station is a good spot to load up on timetables.

Health

Health risks and the quality of medical facilities vary depending on where and how you travel in Thailand. The majority of the major cities and popular tourist areas are well developed with adequate and even excellent medical care. However, travel to remote rural areas can expose you to some health risks and less adequate medical care.

Travellers tend to worry about contracting exotic infectious diseases when visiting the tropics, but such infections are far less common than problems with pre-existing medical conditions such as heart disease, and accidental injury (especially as a result of traffic accidents).

Visitors to Thailand becoming ill in some way is common, however. Respiratory infections, diarrhoea and dengue fever are particular hazards in Thailand. Fortunately most common illnesses can be prevented or are easily treated.

The following advice is a general guide and does not replace the advice of a doctor trained in travel medicine.

BEFORE YOU GO

Pack medications in clearly labelled original containers and obtain a signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions, medications and syringes or needles. If you have a heart condition, bring a copy of your electrocardiography (ECG) taken just prior to travelling.

If you take any regular medication bring double your needs in case of loss or theft. In Thailand you can buy many medications over the counter without a doctor's prescription, but it can be difficult to find the exact medication you are taking.

Insurance

Even if you're fit and healthy, don't travel without health insurance – accidents *do* happen. You may require extra cover for adventure activities such as rock climbing or diving, as well as scooter/motorcycle riding. If your health insurance doesn't cover you for medical expenses abroad, ensure you get specific travel insurance. Most hospitals require an upfront guarantee of pay-

ment (from yourself or your insurer) prior to admission. Inquire before your trip about payment of medical charges and retain all documentation (medical reports, invoices etc) for claim purposes.

Vaccinations

Specialised travel-medicine clinics are your best source of information on which vaccinations you should consider taking. Ideally you should visit a doctor six to eight weeks before departure, but it is never too late. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as the yellow booklet), which will list all the vaccinations you've received. The **Centers for Disease Control** (CDC; www.cdc.gov) has a traveller's health section that contains recommendations for vaccinations. The only vaccine required by international regulations is yellow fever. Proof of vaccination will only be required if you have visited a country in the yellow-fever zone within the six days prior to entering Thailand. If you are travelling to Thailand from Africa or South America you should check to see if you require proof of vaccination.

Medical Checklist

Recommended items for a personal medical kit include the following:

- » antifungal cream, eg Clotrimazole
- » antibacterial cream, eg Muciprocin
- » antibiotic for skin infections, eg Amoxicillin/Clavulanate or Cephalexin
- » antibiotics for diarrhoea include Norfloxacin, Ciprofloxacin or Azithromycin for bacterial diarrhoea; for giardiasis or amoebic dysentery take Tinidazole
- » antihistamine – there are many options, eg Cetrizine for daytime and Promethazine for night

- » antiseptic, eg Betadine
- » antispasmodic for stomach cramps, eg Buscopan
- » contraceptives
- » decongestant
- » DEET-based insect repellent
- » oral rehydration solution for diarrhoea (eg Gastrolyte), diarrhoea 'stopper' (eg Loperamide) and anti-nausea medication
- » first-aid items such as scissors, Elastoplasts, bandages, gauze, thermometer (but not one with mercury), sterile needles and syringes (with a doctor's letter), safety pins and tweezers
- » hand gel (alcohol based) or alcohol-based hand wipes
- » ibuprofen or another anti-inflammatory
- » indigestion medication, eg Quick Eze or Mylanta
- » laxative, eg Coloxyl
- » migraine medicine – for migraine sufferers
- » paracetamol
- » Permethrin to impregnate clothing and mosquito nets if at high risk
- » steroid cream for allergic/itchy rashes, eg 1% to 2% hydrocortisone
- » sunscreen, sunglasses and hat
- » throat lozenges
- » thrush (vaginal yeast infection) treatment, eg Clotrimazole pessaries or Diflucan tablet
- » Ural or equivalent if you are prone to urine infections

IN TRANSIT

Deep Vein Thrombosis

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) occurs when blood clots form in the legs during long trips such as flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the journey, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels

to the lungs, where they can cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and difficulty in breathing. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting) and drink plenty of fluids (non-alcoholic). Those at higher risk should speak with a doctor about extra preventive measures.

Jet Lag & Motion Sickness

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones; it results in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag try drinking plenty of fluids (non-alcoholic) and eating light meals. Upon arrival, seek exposure

to natural sunlight and re-adjust your schedule. Some people find melatonin helpful but it is not available in all countries.

Sedating antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) or Prochlorperazine (Phenergan) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger. Scopolamine patches are considered the most effective prevention.

IN THAILAND

Availability & Cost of Health Care

Bangkok is considered the nearest centre of medical excellence for many countries in Southeast Asia. Private hospitals are more expensive than other medical facilities but offer a superior standard of care and English-speaking staff. Such facilities are listed under Information in the city and some other sections of this book. The cost of health care is relatively cheap in

FURTHER READING

- » **International Travel & Health** (www.who.int/ith) Health guide published by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- » **Centers for Disease Control & Prevention** (www.cdc.gov) Country-specific advice.
- » Your home country's Department of Foreign Affairs or the equivalent; register your trip, a helpful precaution in the event of a natural disaster.
- » *Healthy Travel – Asia & India* (by Lonely Planet) Includes pretrip planning, emergency first aid, and immunisation and disease information.
- » *Traveller's Health: How to Stay Healthy Abroad* (by Dr Richard Dawood) Considered the 'health bible' for international holidays.
- » *Travelling Well* (by Dr Deborah Mills) Health guide-book and website (www.travellingwell.com.au).
- » *Healthy Living in Thailand* (published by the Thai Red Cross) Recommended for long-term travellers.

Thailand compared to most Western countries.

Self-treatment may be appropriate if your problem is minor (eg traveller's diarrhoea), you are carrying the appropriate medication and you are unable to attend a recommended clinic or hospital.

Buying medication over the counter is not recommended, because fake medications and poorly stored or out-of-date drugs are common.

Infectious Diseases

Cutaneous Larva Migrants

This disease, caused by dog or cat hookworm, is particularly common on the beaches of Thailand. The rash starts as a small lump, and then slowly spreads like a winding line. It is intensely itchy, especially at night. It is easily treated with medications and should not be cut out or frozen.

Dengue Fever

This mosquito-borne disease is increasingly problematic throughout Southeast Asia, especially in the cities. As there is no vaccine it can only be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites. The mosquito that carries dengue is a daytime biter, so use insect-avoidance measures at all times. Symptoms include high fever, severe headache (especially behind the eyes), nausea and body aches (dengue was previously known as 'breakbone fever'). Some people develop a rash (which can be very itchy) and experience diarrhoea. The southern islands of Thailand are particularly high-risk areas. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol – do not take aspirin or ibuprofen as they increase the risk of haemorrhaging. See a doctor to be diagnosed and monitored.

Dengue can progress to the more severe and life-threatening dengue haemorrhagic fever, however this is very uncommon in tourists.

The risk of this increases substantially if you have previously been infected with dengue and are then infected with a different serotype.

Hepatitis A

The risk in Bangkok is decreasing but there is still significant risk in most of the country. This food- and waterborne virus infects the liver, causing jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), nausea and lethargy. There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. In rare instances, it can be fatal for those over the age of 40. All travellers to Thailand should be vaccinated against hepatitis A.

Hepatitis B

The only sexually transmitted disease (STD) that can be prevented by vaccination, hepatitis B is spread by body fluids, including sexual contact. In some parts of Thailand up to 20% of the population are carriers of hepatitis B, and usually are unaware of this. The long-term consequences can include liver cancer, cirrhosis and death.

HIV

HIV is now one of the most common causes of death in people under the age of 50 in Thailand. Always practise safe sex; avoid getting tattoos or using unclean syringes.

Influenza

Present year-round in the tropics, influenza (flu) symptoms include high fever, muscle aches, runny nose, cough and sore throat. Flu is the most common vaccine-preventable disease contracted by travellers and everyone should consider vaccination. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol. Complications such as bronchitis or middle-

ear infection may require antibiotic treatment.

Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is contracted from exposure to infected surface water – most commonly after river rafting or canyoning. Early symptoms are very similar to the flu and include headache and fever. It can vary from a very mild ailment to a fatal disease. Diagnosis is made through blood tests and it is easily treated with Doxycycline.

Malaria

There is an enormous amount of misinformation concerning malaria. Malaria is caused by a parasite transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. The most important symptom of malaria is fever, but general symptoms such as headache, diarrhoea, cough or chills may also occur – the same symptoms as many other infections. A diagnosis can only be made by taking a blood sample.

Most parts of Thailand visited by tourists, particularly city and resort areas, have minimal to no risk of malaria, and the risk of side effects from taking antimalarial tablets is likely to outweigh the risk of getting the disease itself. If you are travelling to high-risk rural areas (unlikely for most visitors), seek medical advice on the right medication and dosage for you.

Travellers are advised to prevent mosquito bites by taking these steps:

- » use a DEET-containing insect repellent on exposed skin; natural repellents such as citronella can be effective, but must be repeatedly applied
- » sleep under a mosquito net, ideally impregnated with Permethrin
- » choose accommodation with screens and fans
- » impregnate clothing with Permethrin in high-risk areas
- » wear long sleeves and trousers in light colours

RARE BUT BE AWARE

- » Avian Influenza – Most of those infected have had close contact with sick or dead birds.
- » Filariasis – A mosquito-borne disease that is common in the local population; practise mosquito-avoidance measures.
- » Hepatitis E – Transmitted through contaminated food and water and has similar symptoms to hepatitis A; can be a severe problem in pregnant women. Follow safe eating and drinking guidelines.
- » Japanese B Encephalitis – Viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes, typically occurring in rural areas; vaccination is recommended for travellers spending more than one month outside cities or for long-term expats.
- » Melioidosis – Contracted by skin contact with soil. Affects up to 30% of the local population in northeastern Thailand. The symptoms are very similar to those experienced by tuberculosis (TB) sufferers. There is no vaccine but it can be treated with medications.
- » Strongyloides – A parasite transmitted by skin contact with soil; common in local population. It is characterised by an unusual skin rash – a linear rash on the trunk which comes and goes. An overwhelming infection can follow. It can be treated with medications.
- » Tuberculosis – Medical and aid workers and long-term travellers who have significant contact with the local population should take precautions. Vaccination is recommended for children spending more than three months in Thailand. The main symptoms are fever, cough, weight loss, night sweats and tiredness. Treatment is available with long-term multidrug regimens.
- » Typhus – Murine typhus is spread by the bite of a flea; scrub typhus is spread via a mite. Symptoms include fever, muscle pains and a rash. Following general insect-avoidance measures and doxycycline will also prevent them.

- » use mosquito coils
- » spray your room with insect repellent before going out for your evening meal

Measles

This highly contagious viral infection is spread through coughing and sneezing. Most people born before 1966 are immune as they had the disease in childhood. Measles starts with a high fever and rash and can be complicated by pneumonia and brain disease. There is no specific treatment. Ensure you are fully vaccinated.

Rabies

This uniformly fatal disease is spread by the bite or lick of an infected animal – most commonly a dog or monkey. You should seek medical advice immediately after any animal bite and commence post-exposure treatment. Having a pretravel vaccination means the postbite treatment is greatly simplified.

If an animal bites you, gently wash the wound with soap and water, and apply iodine-based antiseptic. If you are not prevaccinated you will need to receive rabies immunoglobulin as

soon as possible, followed by five shots of vaccine over 28 days. If prevaccinated you need just two shots of vaccine given three days apart.

STDs

Sexually transmitted diseases most common in Thailand include herpes, warts, syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia. People carrying these diseases often have no signs of infection. Condoms will prevent gonorrhoea and chlamydia but not warts or herpes. If after a sexual encounter you develop any rash, lumps, discharge or pain when passing urine seek immediate medical attention. If you have been sexually active during your travels have an STD check on your return home.

Typhoid

This serious bacterial infection is spread through food and water. It gives a high and slowly progressive fever, severe headache, and may be accompanied by a dry cough and stomach pain. It is diagnosed by blood tests and treated with antibiotics. Vaccination is recommended for all travellers spending more than a week in Thailand, or travelling outside of the major cities. Be aware that vaccination is not 100% effective so you must still be careful with what you eat and drink.

Traveller's Diarrhoea

Traveller's diarrhoea is by far the most common problem affecting travellers – up to 50% of people will suffer from some form of it within two weeks of starting their trip. In over 80% of cases, traveller's diarrhoea is caused by a bacteria (there are numerous potential culprits), and responds promptly to treatment with antibiotics.

Here we define traveller's diarrhoea as the passage of more than three watery

bowel movements within 24 hours, plus at least one other symptom such as vomiting, fever, cramps, nausea or feeling generally unwell.

Treatment consists of staying well hydrated; rehydration solutions such as Gastrolyte are the best for this. Antibiotics such as Norfloxacin, Ciprofloxacin or Azithromycin will kill the bacteria quickly.

Loperamide is just a 'stopper' and doesn't get to the cause of the problem. It can be helpful, for example if you have to go on a long bus ride. Don't take Loperamide if you have a fever, or blood in your stools. Seek medical attention quickly if you do not respond to an appropriate antibiotic.

Giardia lamblia is a parasite that is relatively common in travellers. Symptoms include nausea, bloating, excess gas, fatigue and intermittent diarrhoea. 'Eggy' burps are often attributed solely to giardiasis. The treatment of choice is Tinidazole, with Metronidazole being a second-line option.

Amoebic dysentery is very rare in travellers but may be misdiagnosed by poor-quality labs. Symptoms are similar to bacterial diarrhoea. You should always seek reliable medical care if you have blood in your diarrhoea. Treatment involves two drugs; Tinidazole or Metronidazole to kill the parasite in your gut and then a second drug to kill the cysts. If left untreated complications, such as liver abscesses, can occur.

Environmental Hazards

Food

Eating in restaurants is the biggest risk factor for contracting traveller's diarrhoea. Ways to avoid it include eating only freshly cooked food, and avoiding food that has been sitting around in buffets. Peel all fruit and cook

vegetables. Eat in busy restaurants with a high turnover of customers.

Heat

Many parts of Thailand are hot and humid throughout the year. For most people it takes at least two weeks to adapt to the hot climate. Prevent swelling of the feet and ankles as well as muscle cramps caused by excessive sweating by avoiding dehydration and excessive activity in the hot hours of the day.

Heat stroke is a serious medical emergency and requires immediate medical treatment. Symptoms come on suddenly and include weakness, nausea, a hot dry body with a body temperature of over 41°C, dizziness, confusion, loss of coordination, fits and eventually collapse and loss of consciousness.

Insect Bites & Stings

Bedbugs live in the cracks of furniture and walls and then migrate to the bed at night to feed on you. You can treat the itch with an antihistamine. Lice inhabit various parts of your body but most commonly your head and pubic area. Transmission is via close contact with an infected person. They can be difficult to treat and you may need numerous applications of an antilice shampoo such as Permethrin. Pubic lice are usually contracted from sexual contact.

Ticks are contracted when walking in rural areas. They are commonly found behind the ears, on the belly and in armpits. If you have had a tick bite and experience symptoms such as a rash at the site of the bite or elsewhere, fever or muscle aches you should see a doctor. Doxycycline prevents tick-borne diseases.

Leeches are found in humid rainforest areas. They do not transmit any disease but their bites are often intensely itchy for weeks afterwards and can easily become

infected. Apply an iodine-based antiseptic to any leech bite to help prevent infection.

Bee and wasp stings mainly cause problems for people who are allergic to them. Anyone with a serious allergy should carry an injection of adrenaline (eg an EpiPen) for emergencies. For others, pain is the main problem – apply ice to the sting and take painkillers.

Parasites

Numerous parasites are common in local populations in Thailand, but most of these are rare in travellers. The two rules to follow to avoid parasitic infections are to wear shoes and to avoid eating raw food, especially fish, pork and vegetables. A number of parasites are transmitted via the skin by walking barefoot, including strongyloides, hookworm and cutaneous *larva migrans*.

Skin Problems

Prickly heat is a common skin rash in the tropics, caused by sweat being trapped under the skin. Treat by taking cool showers and using powders.

Two fungal rashes commonly affect travellers. The first occurs in the groin, armpits and between the toes. It starts as a red patch that slowly spreads and is usually itchy. Treatment involves keeping the skin dry, avoiding chafing and using an antifungal cream such as Clotrimazole or Lamisil. The fungus *Tinea versicolor* causes small and light-coloured patches, most commonly on the back, chest and shoulders. Consult a doctor.

Cuts and scratches become easily infected in humid climates. Immediately wash all wounds in clean water and apply antiseptic. If you develop signs of infection, see a doctor. Coral cuts can easily become infected.

Snakes

Though snake bites are rare for travellers, there are over

85 species of venomous snakes in Thailand. Always wear boots and long pants if walking in an area that may have snakes. First aid in the event of a snake bite involves 'pressure immobilisation' using an elastic bandage firmly wrapped around the affected limb, starting at the hand or foot (depending on the limb bitten) and working up towards the chest. The bandage should not be so tight that the circulation is cut off, and the fingers or toes should be kept free so the circulation can be checked. Immobilise the limb with a splint and carry the victim to medical attention. It is very important that the victim stays immobile. Do not use tourniquets or try to suck the venom out.

The Thai Red Cross produces antivenom for many of the poisonous snakes in Thailand.

Sunburn

Even on a cloudy day sunburn can occur rapidly. Use a strong sunscreen (at least factor 30), making sure to reapply after a swim, and always wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses outdoors. Avoid lying in the sun when the sun is at its highest in the sky (10am to 2pm). If you become sunburnt stay out of the sun until you have recovered, apply cool compresses and take painkillers for the discomfort. One per cent hydrocortisone cream applied twice daily is also helpful.

Travelling With Children

Thailand is relatively safe for children from a health point of view. It is wise to consult a doctor who specialises in travel medicine prior to travel to ensure your child is appropriately prepared. A medical kit designed specifically for children includes paracetamol or Tylenol syrup for fevers, an antihistamine, itch cream, first-aid supplies,

nappy-rash treatment, sunscreen and insect repellent. It is a good idea to carry a general antibiotic (best used under medical supervision) – Azithromycin is an ideal paediatric formula used to treat bacterial diarrhoea, as well as ear, chest and throat infections.

Good resources are the Lonely Planet publication *Travel with Children*, and for those spending longer away

Jane Wilson-Howarth's book *Your Child's Health Abroad* is excellent.

Women's Health

Pregnant women should receive specialised advice before travelling. The ideal time to travel is in the second trimester (16 and 28 weeks), when pregnancy-related risks are at their lowest.

JELLYFISH STINGS

Box jellyfish stings range from minor to deadly. A good rule of thumb, however, is to presume a box jelly is dangerous until proven otherwise. There are two main types of box jellyfish – multitentacled and single-tentacled.

Multitentacled box jellyfish are present in Thai waters – these are potentially the most dangerous and a severe envenomation can kill an adult within two minutes. They are generally found on sandy beaches near river mouths and mangroves during the warmer months.

There are many types of single-tentacled box jellyfish, some of which can cause severe symptoms known as the Irukandji syndrome. The initial sting can seem minor; however severe symptoms such as back pain, nausea, vomiting, sweating, difficulty breathing and a feeling of impending doom can develop between five and 40 minutes later. There has been the occasional death reported from this syndrome as a result of high blood pressure causing strokes or heart attacks.

There are many other jellyfish in Thailand that cause irritating stings but no serious effects. The only way to prevent these stings is to wear protective clothing, which provides a barrier between human skin and the jellyfish.

First Aid for Severe Stings

For severe life-threatening envenomations the first priority is keeping the person alive. Stay with the person, send someone to call for medical help, and start immediate CPR if they are unconscious. If the victim is conscious douse the stung area liberally with vinegar – simple household vinegar is fine – for 30 seconds. For single-tentacled jellyfish stings pour vinegar onto the stung area as above; early application can make a huge difference. It is best to seek medical care quickly in case any other symptoms develop over the next 40 minutes.

Australia and Thailand are now working in close collaboration to identify the species of jellyfish in Thai waters, as well as their ecology – hopefully enabling better prediction and detection of the jellyfish.

Thanks to Dr Peter Fenner for the information in this boxed text.

Avoid rural travel in areas with poor transport and medical facilities. Most of all, ensure travel insurance covers all pregnancy-related possibilities, including premature labour.

Malaria is a high-risk disease in pregnancy. Advice from the WHO recommends that pregnant women do *not* travel to those areas with Chloroquine-resistant malaria. None of the more effective

antimalarial drugs is completely safe in pregnancy.

Traveller's diarrhoea can quickly lead to dehydration and result in inadequate blood flow to the placenta. Many of the drugs used to treat various diarrhoea bugs are not recommended in pregnancy. Azithromycin is considered safe.

In Thailand's urban areas, supplies of sanitary products are readily available. Your personal birth-control option

may not be available so bring adequate supplies. Heat, humidity and antibiotics can all contribute to thrush. Treatment of thrush is with antifungal creams and pessaries such as Clotrimazole. A practical alternative is one tablet of fluconazole (Diflucan). Urinary-tract infections can be precipitated by dehydration or long bus journeys without toilet stops; bring suitable antibiotics for treatment.

Language

Thailand's official language is effectively the dialect spoken and written in central Thailand, which has successfully become the lingua franca of all Thai and non-Thai ethnic groups in the kingdom.

In Thai the meaning of a single syllable may be altered by means of different tones. In standard Thai there are five: low tone, mid tone, falling tone, high tone and rising tone. The range of all five tones is relative to each speaker's vocal range, so there is no fixed 'pitch' intrinsic to the language.

- » **low tone** – 'Flat' like the mid tone, but pronounced at the relative bottom of one's vocal range. It is low, level and has no inflection, eg **bàht** (baht – the Thai currency).
- » **mid tone** – Pronounced 'flat', at the relative middle of the speaker's vocal range, eg **dee** (good). No tone mark is used.
- » **falling tone** – Starting high and falling sharply, this tone is similar to the change in pitch in English when you are emphasising a word, or calling someone's name from afar, eg **mái** (no/not).
- » **high tone** – Usually the most difficult for non-Thai speakers. It's pronounced near the relative top of the vocal range, as level as possible, eg **máh** (horse).
- » **rising tone** – Starting low and gradually rising, sounds like the inflection used by English speakers to imply a question – 'Yes?', eg **sáhm** (three).

The Thai government has instituted the Royal Thai General Transcription System (RTGS) as a standard method of writing Thai using the Roman alphabet. It's used in official documents, road signs and on maps.

WANT MORE?

For in-depth language information and handy phrases, check out Lonely Planet's *Phrasebook Name*. You'll find it at **shop.lonelyplanet.com**, or you can buy Lonely Planet's iPhone phrasebooks at the Apple App Store.

However, local variations crop up on signs, menus etc. Generally, names in this book follow the most common practice.

In our coloured pronunciation guides, the hyphens indicate syllable breaks within words, and some syllables are further divided with a dot to help you pronounce compound vowels, eg **méu·a·rai** (when).

The vowel **a** is pronounced as in 'about', **aa** as the 'a' in 'bad', **ah** as the 'a' in 'father', **ai** as in 'aisle', **air** as in 'flair' (without the 'r'), **eu** as the 'er' in 'her' (without the 'r'), **ew** as in 'new' (with rounded lips), **oh** as the 'o' in 'toe', **or** as in 'torn' (without the 'r') and **ow** as in 'now'.

Most consonants correspond to their English counterparts. The exceptions are **b** (a hard 'p' sound, almost like a 'b', eg in 'hip-bag'); **d** (a hard 't' sound, like a sharp 'd', eg in 'mid-tone'); **ng** (as in 'singing'; in Thai it can occur at the start of a word) and **r** (as in 'run' but flapped; in everyday speech it's often pronounced like 'l').

BASICS

The social structure of Thai society demands different registers of speech depending on who you're talking to. To make things simple we've chosen the correct form of speech appropriate to the context of each phrase.

When being polite, the speaker ends his or her sentence with **kráp** (for men) or **ká** (for women). It is the gender of the speaker that is being expressed here; it is also the common way to answer 'yes' to a question or show agreement.

The masculine and feminine forms of phrases in this chapter are indicated where relevant with 'm/f'.

Hello.	สวัสดี	sà-wàt-dee
Goodbye.	ลาก่อน	lah gòrn
Yes.	ใช่	chài
No.	ไม่	mài
Please.	ขอ	kôr
Thank you.	ขอบคุณ	kòrp kun
You're welcome.	ยินดี	yin dee
Excuse me.	ขออภัย	kôr à-pai
Sorry.	ขอโทษ	kôr tòht

How are you?		
สบายดีไหม	sà-bai dee mǎi	
Fine. And you?		
สบายดีครับ/ค่ะ	sà-bai dee kráp/ kâ láa-ou kun lâ (m/f)	
What's your name?		
คุณชื่ออะไร	kun chêu à-rai	
My name is ...		
ผม/ดิฉันชื่อ...	pòm/di-chăn chêu ... (m/f)	

Do you speak English?		
คุณพูดภาษาอังกฤษได้ไหม	kun pòot pah-sǎh ang-grít dǎi mǎi	

I don't understand.		
ผม/ดิฉันไม่เข้าใจ	pòm/di-chăn mǎi kôw jai (m/f)	

ACCOMMODATION

Where's a ...?	... อยู่ที่ไหน	... yòo tée nǎi
campsite	ค่ายพักแรม	kâi pák raam
guesthouse	บ้านพัก	bǎhn pák
hotel	โรงแรม	rohng raam
youth hostel	บ้าน เยาวชน	bǎhn yow-wá-chon

Do you have a ... room?	มีห้อง ...	mee hòrng ...
single	ใหม่	mǎi
double	เดี่ยว	dèe-o
twinn	เตียงคู่	dèe-ang kôo
	สองเตียง	sòrng dee-ang

air-con	แอร์	aa
bathroom	ห้องน้ำ	hòrng nám
laundry	ห้องซักผ้า	hòrng sák phá
mosquito net	มุ้ง	múng
window	หน้าต่าง	nǎh dàhng

Question Words

What?	อะไร	à-rai
When?	เมื่อไร	mêu-a-rai
Where?	ที่ไหน	têe nǎi
Who?	ใคร	krai
Why?	ทำไม	tam-mai

DIRECTIONS

Where's ...?		
... อยู่ที่ไหน	... yòo tée nǎi	
What's the address?		
ที่อยู่คืออะไร	têe yòo keu à-rai	
Could you please write it down?		
เขียนลงให้ได้อะไร	kêe-an long hâi dǎi mǎi	
Can you show me (on the map)?		
ให้ดู (ในแผนที่) ได้ไหม	hâi doo (nai pǎan tée) dǎi mǎi	
Turn left/right.		
เลี้ยวซ้าย/ขวา	lêe-o sái/kwǎh	

It's ...	อยู่ ...	yòo ...
behind	ทีหลัง	têe lǎng
in front of	ตรงหน้า	drong nǎh
near	ใกล้ๆ	glâi glâi
next to	ข้างๆ	kǎhng kǎhng
straight ahead	ตรงไป	drong bai

EATING & DRINKING

I'd like (the menu), please.		
ขอ (รายการอาหาร) หน่อย	kôr (rai gahn ah-hǎhn) nòy	
What would you recommend?		
คุณแนะนำอะไรบ้าง	kun nǎa-nam à-rai bǎhng	
That was delicious!		
อร่อยมาก	à-ròy mǎhk	
Cheers!		
ไชโย	chai-yoh	
Please bring the bill.		
ขอบิลหน่อย	kôr bin nòy	

I don't eat ...	ผม/ดิฉัน ไม่กิน ...	pòm/di-chăn mǎi gin ... (m/f)
eggs	ไข่	kâi
fish	ปลา	blah
red meat	เนื้อแดง	nêu-a daang
nuts	ถั่ว	tòu-a

Key Words

bar	บาร์	bah
bottle	ขวด	kòo-at
bowl	ชาม	chahm
breakfast	อาหารเช้า	ah-hähn chów
cafe	ร้านกาแฟ	ráhn gah-faa
chopsticks	ไม้ตะเกียบ	mái ðà-gèe-ap
cold	เย็น	yen
cup	ถ้วย	tóo-ay
dessert	ของหวาน	kǒrng wáhn
dinner	อาหารเย็น	ah-hähn yen
drink list	รายการเครื่องดื่ม	rai gahn kréu-ang dèum
fork	ส้อม	sòrm
glass	แก้ว	gåu-ou
hot	ร้อน	rón
knife	มีด	mêet
lunch	อาหารกลางวัน	ah-hähn glahng wan
market	ตลาด	ðà-làht
menu	รายการอาหาร	rai gahn ah-hähn
plate	จาน	jahn
restaurant	ร้านอาหาร	ráhn ah-hähn
spicy	เผ็ด	pèt
spoon	ช้อน	chórn
vegetarian (person)	คนกินเจ	kon gin jair

Signs

ทางเข้า	Entrance
ทางออก	Exit
เปิด	Open
ปิด	Closed
ที่ติดต่อสอบถาม	Information
ห้าม	Prohibited
ห้องสุขา	Toilets
ชาย	Men
หญิง	Women

with	มี	mee
without	ไม่มี	mái mee

Meat & Fish

beef	เนื้อ	néu-a
chicken	ไก่	gåi
crab	ปู	boo
duck	เป็ด	bèt
fish	ปลา	blah
meat	เนื้อ	néu-a
pork	หมู	mǒo
seafood	อาหารทะเล	ah-hähn tá-lair
squid	ปลาหมึก	blah mèuk

Fruit & Vegetables

banana	กล้วย	glóo-ay
beans	ถั่ว	tòo-a
coconut	มะพร้าว	má-prów
eggplant	มะเขือ	má-kéu-a
fruit	ผลไม้	pǒn-lá-mái
guava	ฝรั่ง	fa-ràng
lime	มะนาว	má-now
mango	มะม่วง	má-móo-ang
mangosteen	มังคุด	mang-kút
mushrooms	เห็ด	hèt
nuts	ถั่ว	tòo-a
papaya	มะละกอ	má-lá-gor
potatoes	มันฝรั่ง	man fa-ràng
rambutan	เงาะ	ngó
tamarind	มะขาม	má-káhm
tomatoes	มะเขือเทศ	má-kéu-a tèt
vegetables	ผัก	pàk
watermelon	แตงโม	ðang moh

Other

chilli	พริก	prik
egg	ไข่	kài
fish sauce	น้ำปลา	nám blah
ice	น้ำแข็ง	nám kǎng

noodles	เส้น	sên
oil	น้ำมัน	nám man
pepper	พริกไทย	prik tai
rice	ข้าว	kôw
salad	ผักสด	pák sòt
salt	เกลือ	gleu-a
soup	น้ำซุป	nám súp
soy sauce	น้ำซอ	nám see-éw
sugar	น้ำตาล	nám ðahn
tofu	เต้าหู้	dôw hòu

Drinks

beer	เบียร์	bee-a
coffee	กาแฟ	gah-faa
milk	นมจืด	nom jèut
orange juice	น้ำส้ม	nám sóm
soy milk	น้ำเต้าหู้	nám dôw hòu
sugar-cane juice	น้ำอ้อย	nám ôy
tea	ชา	chah
water	น้ำดื่ม	nám dèum

EMERGENCIES

Help!	ช่วยด้วย	chôu-ay dóo-ay
Go away!	ไปให้พ้น	bai hái pón

Call a doctor!
เรียกหมอหน่อย rêu-ak mǎo nòi

Call the police!
เรียกตำรวจหน่อย rêu-ak ðam-rò-at nòi

I'm ill.
ผม/ดิฉันป่วย pǎm/di-chăn bòo-ay (m/f)

I'm lost.
ผม/ดิฉัน
หลงทาง pǎm/di-chăn
lǒng tahng (m/f)

Where are the toilets?
ห้องน้ำอยู่ที่ไหน hòng nám yòo tée nài

SHOPPING & SERVICES

I'd like to buy ...
อยากจะทำ ... yàhk jà séu ...

I'm just looking.
ดูเฉย ๆ doo chêu-i chêu-i

Can I look at it?
ขอดูได้ไหม kǒr doo dài mǎi

How much is it?
เท่าไร têu-rai

That's too expensive.
แพงไป paang bai

Can you lower the price?
ลดราคาได้ไหม lót rah-kah dài mǎi

There's a mistake in the bill.
บิลใบนี้ผิด bin bai née pit ná
นะครับ/ค่ะ kráp/kâ (m/f)

TIME & DATES

What time is it?
กี่โมงแล้ว gèe mohng láa-ou

morning	เช้า	chôw
afternoon	บ่าย	bài
evening	เย็น	yen
yesterday	เมื่อวาน	mêu-a wahn
today	วันนี้	wan née
tomorrow	พรุ่งนี้	prùng née

Monday	วันจันทร์	wan jan
Tuesday	วันอังคาร	wan ang-kahn
Wednesday	วันพุธ	wan pút
Thursday	วันพฤหัสบดี	wan pá-rêu-hát
Friday	วันศุกร์	wan sùk
Saturday	วันเสาร์	wan sǎw
Sunday	วันอาทิตย์	wan ah-tít

TRANSPORT

Public Transport

bicycle	สามล้อ	sǎhm lór
rickshaw		
boat	เรือ	reu-a
bus	รถเมล์	rót mair
car	รถแท็กซี่	rót gěng
motorcycle	มอเตอร์ไซด์	mor-đeu-sai
taxi	รับจ้าง	ráp jǎhng
plane	เครื่องบิน	krêu-ang bin
train	รถไฟ	rót fai
túk-túk	ตุ๊ก ๆ	đúk đúk

Numbers

1	หนึ่ง	nèung
2	สอง	sǒrng
3	สาม	sǎhm
4	สี่	sèe
5	ห้า	hǎh
6	หก	hòk
7	เจ็ด	jèt
8	แปด	bàat
9	เก้า	gòw
10	สิบ	sip
11	สิบเอ็ด	sip-èt
20	ยี่สิบ	yèe-sip
21	ยี่สิบเอ็ด	yèe-sip-èt
30	สามสิบ	sǎhm-sip
40	สี่สิบ	sèe-sip
50	ห้าสิบ	hǎh-sip
60	หกสิบ	hòk-sip
70	เจ็ดสิบ	jèt-sip
80	แปดสิบ	bàat-sip
90	เก้าสิบ	gòw-sip
100	หนึ่งร้อย	nèung rói
1000	หนึ่งพัน	nèung pan
10,000	หนึ่งหมื่น	nèung mèn
100,000	หนึ่งแสน	nèung sǎan
1,000,000	หนึ่งล้าน	nèung láhn

When's the ... bus?	รถเมล์คัน ... มาเมื่อไร	rót mair kan ... mah mêu-a rai
first	แรก	rǎak
last	สุดท้าย	sút tái
next	ต่อไป	dòr bai

A ... ticket, please.	ขอตั๋ว ...	kòr dǎo-a ...
one-way	เที่ยวเดียว	tée-o dee-o
return	ไปกลับ	bai glàp

I'd like a/an ... seat.	ต้องการที่นั่ง ...	dǒng gahn tèe nǎng ...
aisle	ติดทางเดิน	dít tahng deun
window	ติดหน้าต่าง	dít nǎh dǎhng

platform	ชานชาลา	chan-chah-lah
ticket window	ช่องขายตั๋ว	chôngg kǎi dǎo-a
timetable	ตารางเวลา	dǎh-rahng wair-lah

What time does it get to (Chiang Mai)?

ถึง (เชียงใหม่)	tèung (chee-ang mǎi)
กี่โมง	gèe mohng

Does it stop at (Saraburi)?

รถจอดที่ (สระบุรี)	rót jòrt tée (sà-rà-bù-ree)
ไหม	mǎi

Please tell me when we get to (Chiang Mai).

เมื่อถึง (เชียงใหม่)	mêu-a tèung (chee-ang mǎi)
กรุณาบอกด้วย	gà-rú-nah bòrk dǎo-ay

I'd like to get off at (Saraburi).

ขอลงที่(สระบุรี)	kòr long tée (sà-rà-bù-ree)
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Driving & Cycling

I'd like to hire a/an ...	อยากจะเช่า ...	yǎhk jà chǎw ...
4WD car	รถโฟร์วีล	rót foh ween
motorbike	รถเก๋ง	rót gěng
	รถมอเตอร์ไซด์	rót mor-deu-sai

I'd like ...	ต้องการ ...	dǒng gahn ...
my bicycle repaired	ซ่อมรถจักรยาน	sòrm rót jàk-gà-yahn
to hire a bicycle	เช่ารถจักรยาน	chǎw rót jàk-gà-yahn

Is this the road to (Ban Bung Wai)?

ทางนี้ไป (บ้านบุ่งหวาย) ไหม	tahng née bai (bǎhn bùng wǎi) mǎi
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Where's a petrol station?

ปั้มน้ำมันอยู่ที่ไหน	bǎm nám man yòt tée nǎi
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Can I park here?

จอดที่นี่ได้ไหม	jòrt tée née dǎi mǎi
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How long can I park here?

จอดที่นี่ได้นานเท่าไร	jòrt tée née dǎi nahn tǎw-rai
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I need a mechanic.

ต้องการช่างรถ	dǒng gahn chǎhng rót
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I have a flat tyre.

ยางแบน	yahng baan
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I've run out of petrol.

หมดน้ำมัน	mòt nám man
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Do I need a helmet?

ต้องใช้หมวกกันน็อกไหม	dǒngg cháit mò-ak gan nók mǎi
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GLOSSARY

This glossary includes Thai, Pali (P) and Sanskrit (S) words and terms frequently used in this guidebook. For definitions of food and drink terms, see p785.

ah-hähn – food

ah-hähn päh – ‘jungle food’, usually referring to dishes made with wild game

ajahn – (*aa jaan*) respectful title for ‘teacher’; from the Sanskrit term *acarya*

amphoe – (*amphur*) district, the next subdivision down from province

amphoe meu-ang – provincial capital

AUA – American University Alumni

bähn – (*ban*) house or village

baht – (*bàat*) the Thai unit of currency

bàht – a unit of weight equal to 15g; rounded bowl used by monks for receiving alms food

bai sǎe – sacred thread used by monks or shamans in certain religious ceremonies

ben-jà-ronng – traditional five-coloured Thai ceramics

BKS – Baw Khaw Saw (Thai acronym for the Transport Company)

BMA – Bangkok Metropolitan Authority; Bangkok’s municipal government

bodhisattva (S) – in Theravada Buddhism, the term used to refer to the previous lives of the Buddha prior to his enlightenment

bòht – central sanctuary in a Thai temple used for the monastic order’s official business, such as ordinations; from the Pali term *uposatha* (*ubohsòt*); see also *wi-hähn*

bòr nám rónn – hot springs

Brahman – pertaining to Brahmanism, an ancient re-

ligious tradition in India and the predecessor of Hinduism; not to be confused with ‘Brahmin’, the priestly class in India’s caste system

BTS – Bangkok Transit System (Skytrain); Thai: *rót fai fáh*

‘bah-dé – batik

‘bàk dái – southern Thailand

‘bèe-pàht – classical Thai orchestra

‘bohng-lahng – northeastern Thai marimba (percussion instrument) made of short logs

CAT – CAT Telecom Public Company Limited

chedi – see *stupa*

chow – folk; people

chow lair – (*chow nám*) sea gypsies

chow nah – farmer

CPT – Communist Party of Thailand

doy – mountain in the Northern Thai dialect; spelt ‘Doi’ in proper names

dà-làht – market

dà-làht nám – water market

‘dam-bon – (*tambol*) precinct, next governmental subdivision under *amphoe*

‘dròrk – (*trok*) alley, smaller than a soi

fa-ràng – a Westerner (person of European origin); also *guava*

gà-teu-i – (*kàthoey*) Thailand’s ‘third gender’, usually cross-dressing or transsexual males; also called ladyboys

gopura (S) – entrance pavilion in traditional Hindu temple architecture, often seen in Angkor-period temple complexes

góo-ay hâng – Chinese-style work shirt

grà-bèe grà-borng – a traditional Thai martial art employing short swords and staves

gù-dì – monk’s dwelling

hàht – beach; spelt ‘Hat’ in proper names

hǐn – stone

hǒr drai – a Tripitaka (Buddhist scripture) hall

hǒr glorng – drum tower

hǒr rá-kang – bell tower

hòrng – (*hong*) room; in southern Thailand this refers to semi-submerged island caves

hòrng tǎa-ou – rowhouse or shophouses

Isan – (*ee-sǎhn*) general term used for northeastern Thailand

jataka (P) – (*chah-dòk*) stories of the Buddha’s previous lives

jeen – Chinese

jeen hor – literally ‘galloping Chinese’, referring to horse-riding Yunnanese traders

jòw meu-ang – principality chief; *jòw* means lord, prince or holy being

kaan – reed instrument common in northeastern Thailand

kàthoey – see *gà-teu-i*

klorng – canal; spelt ‘Khlong’ in proper nouns

kòhn – masked dance-drama based on stories from the Ramakian

kon ee-sǎhn – the people of northeastern Thailand; *kon* means person

kǒw – hill or mountain; spelt ‘Khao’ in proper names

KMT – Kuomintang

KNU – Karen National Union

kràbii-kràbawng – see *grà-bèe grà-borng*

ku – small *chedi* that is partially hollow and open

kuáy hâng – see *góo-ay háang*

kùtì – see *gù-đi*

lǎam – cape; spelt ‘Laem’ in proper names

lǎk meu-ang – city pillar

lá-kon – classical Thai dance-drama

lék – little, small (in size); see also *noi*

lí-gair – Thai folk dance-drama

longyi – Burmese sarong

lòok túng – Thai country music

lòw kǒw – white whisky, often homemade rice brew

lòw têu-an – illegal (home-made) whisky

mǎa chee – Thai Buddhist nun

mǎa nám – river; spelt Mae Nam in proper names

Mahanikai – the larger of the two sects of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand

mahathat – (*má-hǎh táht*) common name for temples containing Buddha relics; from the Sanskrit–Pali term *mahadhatu*

má-noh-rah – Southern Thailand’s most popular traditional dance-drama

masjid – (*mát-sà-yít*) mosque

mát-mèe – technique of tie-dyeing silk or cotton threads and then weaving them into complex patterns, similar to Indonesian *ikat*; the term also refers to the patterns themselves

metta (P) – (*mêt-dah*) Buddhist practice of loving-kindness

meu-ang – city or principality

mon-dòp – small square, spired building in a wát; from Sanskrit *mandapa*

moo-ay tai – (*muay thai*) Thai boxing

mǒr lam – an Isan musical tradition akin to *lòok túng*

mǒrn kwǎhn – wedge-shaped pillow popular in northern and northeastern Thailand

MRTA – Metropolitan Rapid Transit Authority, Bangkok’s subway system; Thai: *rót fai fáh dái din*

naga (P/S) – (*nǎhk*) a mythical serpent-like being with magical powers

ná-kon – city; from the Sanskrit–Pali *nagara*; spelt ‘Nakhon’ in proper nouns

nám – water

nám òk – waterfall; spelt ‘Nam Tok’ in proper nouns

nǎng ðà-lung – Thai shadow play

neun – hill; spelt ‘Noen’ in proper names

ngahn têt-sà-gahn – festival

nibbana (P/S) – nirvana; in Buddhist teachings, the state of enlightenment;

escape from the realm of rebirth; Thai: *níp-pahn*

noi – (*nóy*) little, small (amount); see also *lék*

nòrk – outside, outer; spelt ‘Nok’ in proper names

ow – bay or gulf; spelt ‘Ao’ in proper nouns

pǎh ka-máh – cotton sarong worn by men

pǎh mát-mèe – *mát-mèe* fabric

pǎh sîn – cotton sarong worn by women

pǎhk glahng – central Thailand

pǎhk nǎua – northern Thailand

pǎhk tâi – see *pàk dái*

pǎe – ghost, spirit

pín – small, three-stringed lute played with a large plectrum

pìi-pháat – see *pèe-páht*

pík-sù – a Buddhist monk; from the Sanskrit *bhikkhu*, Pali *bhikkhu*

PLAT – People’s Liberation Army of Thailand

pleng koh-râht – Khorat folk song

pleng pêu-a chee-wít – ‘songs for life’, Thai folk-rock music

ponglang – see *hông-lahng*

poo kǒw – mountain

pôo yài bǎhn – village chief

prá – an honorific term used for monks, nobility and Buddha images; spelt ‘Phra’ in proper names

prá krêu-ang – amulets of monks, Buddhas or deities worn around the neck for spiritual protection; also called *prá pim*

prá poom – earth spirits or guardians

prang – (*brahng*) Khmer-style tower on temples

prasada – blessed food offered to Hindu or Sikh temple attendees

prasat – (*brah-sáht*) small ornate building, used for religious purposes, with a cruciform ground plan and needlelike spire, located on temple grounds; any of a number of different kinds of halls or residences with religious or royal significance

PULO – Pattani United Liberation Organization

râi – an area of land measurement equal to 1600 sq metres

reu-a háhng yow – long-tail boat

reu-an tǎa-ou – longhouse

reu-sǎe – an ascetic, hermit or sage (Hindi: *rishi*)

rót aa – blue-and-white air-con bus

rót bráp ah-gàht – air-con bus

rót fai fáh – Bangkok’s Skytrain system

rót fai tâi din – Bangkok’s subway system

rót norn – sleeper bus

rót tam-má-dah – ordinary (non air-con) bus or train

rót too-a – tour or air-con bus

sǎh-lah – open-sided, covered meeting hall or resting place; from Portuguese term *sala*, literally ‘room’

sǎhm-lór – three-wheeled pedicab

sǎhn prá poom – spirit shrine

sǎm-nák sóng – monastic centre

sǎm-nák wí-bàt-sà-nah – meditation centre

samsara (P) – in Buddhist teachings, the realm of rebirth and delusion

sangha – (P) the Buddhist community

satang – (*sà-dahng*) a Thai unit of currency; 100 satang equals 1 baht

sèe yáak – intersection, often used to give driving directions

sémaa – boundary stones used to consecrate ground used for monastic ordinations

serow – Asian mountain goat

séua môh hôrm – blue cotton farmer’s shirt

soi – lane or small street

Songkran – Thai New Year, held in mid-April

sǒo-an ah-hǎhn – outdoor restaurant with any bit of foliage nearby; literally ‘food garden’

sǒrng-tǎa-ou – (literally ‘two rows’) common name for small pick-up trucks with two benches in the back, used as buses/taxis; also spelt ‘*sǎwngthǎew*’

SRT – State Railway of Thailand

stupa – conical-shaped Buddhist monument used to inter sacred Buddhist objects

sù-sǎhn – cemetery

tǎh – pier, boat landing; spelt ‘Tha’ in proper nouns

tǎht – four-sided, curvilinear Buddha reliquary, common in Northeastern Thailand; spelt ‘That’ in proper nouns

tǎht grà-dòok – bone reliquary, a small *stupa* containing remains of a Buddhist devotee

tàlàat náam – see *dà-làht nám*

tām – cave; spelt ‘Tham’ in proper nouns

tam bun – to make merit

tambon – see *dam-bon*

TAT – Tourism Authority of Thailand

têt-sà-bahn – a governmental division in towns or cities much like municipality

THAI – Thai Airways International; Thailand’s national air carrier

thammájàk – Buddhist wheel of law; from the Pali *dhammacakka*

Thammayut – one of the two sects of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand; founded by King Rama IV while he was still a monk

thanǒn – (*tà-nǒn*) street; spelt ‘Thanon’ in proper noun and shortened to ‘Th’

T-pop – popular teen-music

tràwk – see *dròrk*

trimurti (S) – collocation of the three principal Hindu deities, Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu

Tripitaka (S) – Theravada Buddhist scriptures; (Pali: *Tipitaka*)

tú-dong – a series of 13 ascetic practices (for example eating one meal a day, living

at the foot of a tree) undertaken by Buddhist monks; a monk who undertakes such practices; a period of wandering on foot from place to place undertaken by monks

túk-túk – (*đúk-đúk*) motorised *sǎhm-lór*

ùt-sà-nít – flame-shaped head ornament on a Buddha

vipassana (P) – (*wí-bàt-sà-nah*) Buddhist insight meditation

wái – palms-together Thai greeting

wan prá – Buddhist holy days, falling on the days of the main phases of the moon (full, new and half) each month

wang – palace

wát – temple-monastery; from the Pali term *avasa* meaning ‘monk’s dwelling’; spelt ‘Wat’ in proper nouns

wá-tá-ná-tam – culture

wát pǎh – forest monastery

wí-hǎhn – (*wihan, viharn*) any large hall in a Thai temple, usually open to laity; from Sanskrit term *vihara*, meaning ‘dwelling’

Yawi – traditional language of Malay parts of Java, Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula, widely spoken in the most southern provinces of Thailand; the written form uses the classic Arabic script plus five additional letters

yài – big

yǎhm – shoulder bag

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