



Travel Guide





Thai Fruits

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction to the Land of Smiles</i>	4
<i>Formalities and Other Regulations</i>	16
<i>How to Get to Thailand</i>	19
<i>General Tourist Information</i>	24
<i>Communication Services</i>	29
<i>Dining</i>	30
<i>Shopping</i>	32
<i>Entertainment and Recreation</i>	34
<i>Special Interests</i>	40



Wat Si Chum, Sukhothai Historical Park

Introduction to the Land of Smiles

The Kingdom of Thailand is predominantly Buddhist and one of the best countries in the world in which to spend a vacation. Blessed with a tropical climate, it is possible to travel comfortably throughout the country at any time of the year.

Travellers, as soon as they arrive, are safe from the turmoil of life. Even in the big city of Bangkok, the uniqueness of the food, architecture, language, customs, and religion stimulates the senses. Away from the capital city, on the pristine sandy beaches and emerald seas in the South or in the mountains of the North, visitors can drowse their days away in a long, deep, peaceful dream.



The Royal Barge Procession



The population is made up of a rich mix of ethnic groups- mainly Thai, Mon, Khmer, Laotian, Chinese, Malay, Persian, and Indian. Thai culture is evident everywhere in the Kingdom, in Buddhist rites which take place in numerous temples, in the succession of festivals that occur throughout the year, and at the country markets where locals haggle, politely, for everything from food to clothing.





Paddy Field

Landscape

Thailand is divided into four main regions as outlined below:

Central Plains: Twenty-six provinces make up Central Thailand with Bangkok as its centre. The rain-fed network of rivers and canals makes this the most fertile part of Thailand, supporting vast fields of rice, sugar cane, and a variety of fruit.

North: The North's hilly ranges are home to most of Thailand's hill-tribe population. Lightly populated and undisturbed by modern times, these mountain ranges have vast rugged vistas, waterfalls, and trails where one can discover remarkable sights. This region is rich in traditional culture and architecture, including some of the country's most majestic temples.

Northeast: Known as "I-San," this area sits on the Khorat Plateau and traditional Thai customs strongly flourish. Compared to the rest of Thailand, I-san has a slower pace but the people retain the same friendliness that is found throughout the Kingdom. Both Lao and Khmer influences can be experienced in the region's

ancient temple ruins, distinctive food, architecture, and dialects.

South: Bound by the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea, the South is a beach person's paradise. Scattered islands off the coast decorate this tropical haven. Brightly painted fishing boats catch a myriad of sea-food, and long stretches of white sandy beaches beckon.

Climate

Thailand's weather is tropical, hot and humid all year round, with a plentiful rainfall that brings cooler conditions.

Time

Time in the Kingdom of Thailand is seven hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT+7).

Government

The government of Thailand is a constitutional monarchy inspired by the British democratic model. The national voting age is 18.



Songkran Festival





Loi Krathong Sai Festival, Tak

Holidays and Festivals

Exact dates for festivals vary from year to year as many are based on the lunar cycle. The following are just a few of the major holidays and festivals in Thailand:

New Year's Day (1 January)

Magha Puja Day (full moon, third lunar month) - A public holiday commemorating the gathering of the Lord Buddha's disciples that culminates with a candlelit walk around the main chapel of every temple across the country.

Chinese New Year (late January to early February) - A week of festivities and firework displays in the Chinese neighborhoods throughout Thailand.

Chakri Day (6 April) - A public holiday commemorating the founder of the Chakri Dynasty, King Rama I.

Songkran Festival (13-15 April) - During this Thai New Year, people pour scented water into the hands of parents and the elderly and ask for their blessings. Water is splashed on others as a "gesture of good luck." Be prepared to get wet.

Labour Day (1 May)

Coronation Day (5 May) - A public holiday celebrating the coronation of H.M. King Vajiralongkorn (King Rama X).

Royal Ploughing Ceremony Day (May) - Held in May when the rice-growing season begins.

Visakha Puja Day (full moon, sixth lunar month) - A public holiday commemorating the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Lord Buddha.

Asalha Puja Day (full moon, eighth lunar month) - A public holiday marking the Lord Buddha's first sermon.

Khao Phansa (July) - A public holiday celebrating the beginning of Buddhist Lent.

H.M. the King's Birthday (28 July) - A public holiday celebrating the birth of H.M. King Vajiralongkorn.

H.M. the Queen's Birthday / Mother's Day (12 August) - A public holiday celebrating the birth of Queen Sirikit of Thailand.

Ok Phansa (October) - End of Buddhist Lent.

Chulalongkorn Day (23 October) - A public holiday to commemorate the death of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V).

Loi Krathong Festival (full moon, twelfth lunar month) - This most charming of all Thai celebrations usually falls in November. People launch Krathongs, lotus-blossom-shaped vessels made of banana leaves containing a candle, incense sticks, flowers, and coins onto the rivers, lakes, and/or canals to pay respect to the goddess of water.

The King's Rama IX's Birthday (5 December) - A public holiday to commemorate the King Bhumibol Adulyadej's (King Rama IX).

Constitution Day (10 December) - A public holiday celebrating Thailand's democratic constitution.

New Year's Eve (31 December) - Celebrations across the country to ring in the New Year.



Sukhothai Historical Park



Wat Lokkayasutharam, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya

History

The earliest archaeological signs of human habitation in Thailand can be found in the Northeast villages of Ban Chiang and Ban Prasat, where evidence of rice cultivation dates back to 4000 BC.

Over the next several thousand years, three major groups of people, the Mon, Khmer, and Thai, migrated south from China to present-day Thailand. The Mon settled in present day Myanmar, the Khmer moved to what is now Cambodia, and the Thais by 1200 had established dominance in three northern Thai states, Lanna, Sukhothai, and Phayao.

Sukhothai (Dawn of Happiness), which declared its independence in 1238, saw the Thais' gradual expansion throughout the entire Chao Phraya River basin, the establishment of Theravada Buddhism as the dominant religion, the creation of the Thai alphabet, and the emergence of true Thai art forms, including painting, music, architecture, and literature.

The Sukhothai era declined in the 1300s and eventually became a vassal state of Ayutthaya, a dynamic kingdom further south. Founded in 1350, Ayutthaya, 86 kilometres north of Bangkok, was regarded by both Asians and Europeans as one of the most progressive



Ayutthaya Historical Park

and wealthiest kingdoms in the world during that period.

During Ayutthaya's 417 years of prominence, the Thais brought their distinctive culture to fruition, ridding their lands of the Khmer presence and fostering contact with Arabian, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and European powers, especially Portugal and Holland.

Ayutthaya's destruction in 1767 by the Burmese was a severe blow to the Thais. However, the Burmese could not maintain control of the Kingdom. In 1769, King Taksin the Great, ruling from the new capital in Thon Buri, on the banks of the Chao Phraya River, regained control of the Kingdom. In 1782, King Rama I the Great, the first ruler of the Chakri Dynasty moved the royal capital across the river to Bangkok.

Two Chakri monarchs, King Mongkut (Rama IV), who reigned between 1851 and 1868, and his son King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), who reigned from 1869 to 1910, saved Thailand from Western colonisation through brilliant diplomacy and selective modernisation. It is largely due to these two monarchs that Thailand was able to retain dominance over its own destiny without the interference of foreign powers.

Today, Thailand has a constitutional monarchy. Since 1932, Thai kings, including the present monarch, H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej, have exercised their legislative powers by means of a cabinet headed by a prime minister and their judicial powers through the law courts.

Religion

Even though the primary religion is Buddhism, Thailand respects all religions. Thus, sizeable minorities of Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and others freely practise their respective faiths in Thailand under the King's patronage.

Theravada Buddhism, a descendant from Dvaravati Buddhism of the 10th century, is the professed religion of more than 95 percent of all Thais, and it casts a strong influence on daily life. Thailand is the only country in the world to successfully incorporate this form of Buddhism into its legal and moral structure.

It has long been a custom for Buddhist males over the age of 20 to be ordained for a period ranging from five days to three months. This usually occurs during the annual Rains Retreat (Buddhist Lent), a three-month



Wat Arun (The Temple of Dawn), Bangkok

period during the rainy season when all monks forego travel and remain within their temples.

Besides sustaining monastic communities, Thai temples have traditionally served other purposes; such as, the village shelter, news centre, employment information centre, school, hospital, dispensary, and community centre.

Language

Thai remains largely incomprehensible to the casual visitor because it is a tonal language with 5 tones, 20 vowels, and 44 consonants. However, English is widely understood in most tourist areas, particularly Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pattaya, and Phuket. English is spoken in most hotels, shops, restaurants, banks, international offices, and car rental offices in major destinations. Road signs throughout the country are in both Thai and English.





Thai Elephant



Ratchaphruek or the Golden Shower Tree: Nation Flower

Symbols of Thailand

Thailand's Flag: the flag consists of five horizontal stripes, made up of red, white, blue, white, and red colours, with the middle blue stripe being twice as wide as the other stripes. The red, white and blue colours signify the nation, Buddhism, and the monarchy respectively.

National Flower: Ratchaphruek or the Golden Shower Tree is the national flower. This yellow flower symbolises Buddhism, the national religion, and H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who was born on Monday (Monday's colour is yellow).



King Rama II Memorial Park, Samut Songkhram

National Animal: the Thai Elephant is the national animal of Thailand as it has played an important role in Thai history and has a unique bond with the Thai people. The elephants fought alongside past kings to protect the nation's freedom. Moreover, a white elephant was portrayed in the former national flag as it has royal significance, being considered a noble creature that symbolises the king's honour and glory.

National Architecture: Sala Thai, an open-sided pavilion, is the national architecture of Thailand. This beautiful architecture features a traditional Thai structure that represents the exquisite skills of the country's craftspeople. The Sala Thai can be found in temples, along riverbanks, in public and private gardens, or even in the middle of rice fields.

Formalities and Other Regulations

All visitors entering Thailand must possess a valid passport. According to the Ministry of Interior, tourists from countries covered by visa exemption agreements are allowed to stay in Thailand for a period of not exceeding 30 days, whereas tourists from countries that have no visa exemptions can obtain a visa on arrival in the Kingdom if their stay does not exceed 15 days. For a list of the countries of origin that require a visa on arrival, please visit www.immigration.go.th.

The validity of a tourist visa is 3 months or 6 months, which means that visitors with a tourist visa needs to travel to Thailand within 3 or 6 months after the date of issue, and travellers with this type of visa are permitted to stay for a period of not exceeding 30 days or 60 days. Tourists who wish to extend their visas can contact the Immigration Bureau at 507 Soi Suan Phlu, Sathon Tai Road, Bangkok. Tel. +66 2287 3101-10 or visit www.immigration.go.th.

For further information regarding visa requirements, please contact the nearest Thai Embassy or Consulate or visit website www.mfa.go.th.

Health Regulations

No inoculations or vaccinations are required unless the foreign national is coming from or passing through a contaminated area. Yellow fever certificates are required for those who are coming from the following countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Angola, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Nigeria, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Benin, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea Bissau, Guyana, Kenya, Liberia, Niger, Panama, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Suriname, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda and Venezuela.

Note: Please check current regulations with your local health office.

Customs Regulations

Prohibited Items: Narcotics and obscene pictures and written articles are prohibited. Narcotic offenders face severe penalties including a possible death sentence

for possession, consumption and/or manufacture of illegal drugs.

Firearms: Firearms and ammunition can be imported only after a permit has been obtained from the Police Department or Registration Office. Website: <http://home.touristpolice.net>

Personal Effects: A reasonable amount of clothing for personal use, toiletries, and professional instruments may be brought into the Kingdom of Thailand free of duty.

Tobacco and Alcohol: Cigarettes, cigars, or smoking tobacco each or in total must not exceed 250 grammes in weight. Cigarettes must not exceed 200 in quantity. One litre each of wine or spirits may be brought in duty free. Personal items may not exceed 10,000 Baht in value.

Plants and Animals: Certain species of fruits, vegetables, and plants are prohibited. Contact the Agricultural Regulatory Division, Department of Agriculture. (Tel. +66 2579 0151-8, www.doa.go.th)

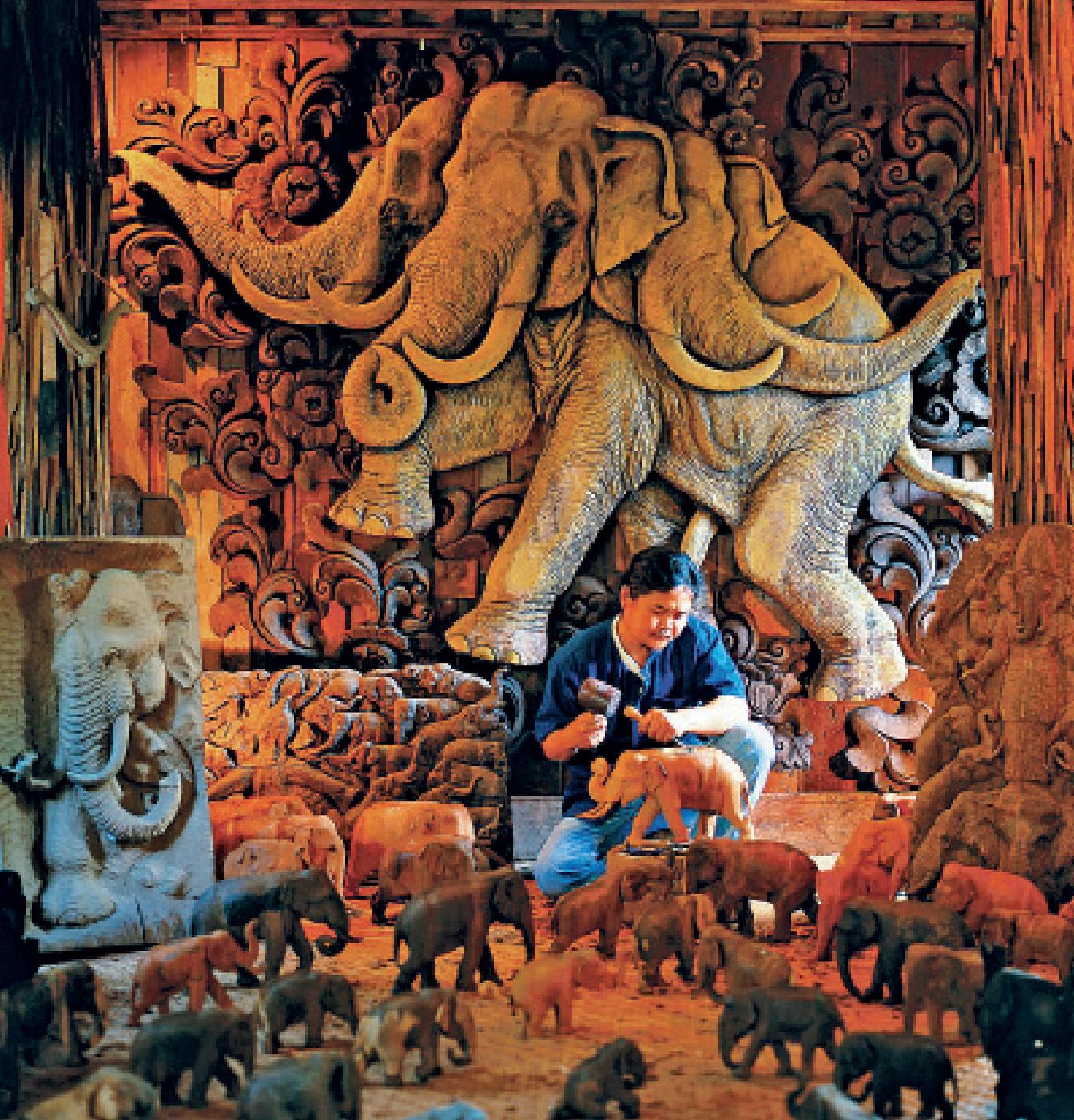
Permission for entry of animals arriving by air can be obtained at the airport. If arriving by sea, an application must be made at the Department for Livestock Development in Bangkok. (Tel. +66 2653 4444) Vaccination certificates are required. Go to www.dld.go.th for further information.

Export of Antiques and Art Objects from the Kingdom of Thailand

1. Buddha images, Bodhisattva images, or fragments thereof are forbidden to be taken from Thailand.

2. A license must be obtained from the Fine Arts Department for such objects of antiquity or objects of art.

For further information and the application for the license, please contact the Bangkok National Museum at Tel. +66 2226 1661 or visit www.virtualmuseum.finearts.go.th.



Wood Carving

Currency and Exchange Service

The Thai unit of currency, the Baht, is not fixed to any other currency but fluctuates with world market rates. The Baht is divided into 100 satang. Copper-coloured coins are valued at 25 and 50 satang. Silver-coloured coins are available in 1 and 5 Baht denominations, whereas gold-coloured coins are available in 2 Baht denominations.

Silver and copper-coloured coins represent 10 Baht denominations. Banknotes are valued at 20 Baht, 50 Baht, 100 Baht, 500 Baht and 1,000 Baht.

Major credit cards as well as travellers' cheques in principal currencies are generally accepted in leading hotels, restaurants, department stores, and several large stores.



Travellers' cheques and foreign currency notes of all major currencies may be exchanged at any commercial bank, most hotels, and foreign exchange counters.

Thai and foreign banks provide a standard service nationwide. Office hours are 9.30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday to Friday, except on public holidays. However, there are banks at shopping malls which operate everyday between 11.00 a.m. and 8.00 p.m. Most ATM machines operate 24 hours and accept all major credit cards. Many first-class hotels provide 24-hour money exchange services, but only for major currencies; such as, American, British, German and Swiss.

Exchange Controls

1. Taking foreign currency that exceeds US\$10,000 into or out of Thailand must be declared at the Customs Office upon arrival or departure. Failure to do so may lead to arrest, confiscation of the excess amount involved, and/or prosecution.

2. Travellers can take a maximum of 50,000 Baht per person out of the country without authorisation. Thai currency up to 500,000 Baht can be taken to the neighbouring countries of Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam without authorisation.

3. Foreign visitors may bring personal effects and other goods that are not prohibited by current customs regulations. Other than personal effects, visitors are also allowed to take out merchandise bought from duty-free shops, including precious stones, gold, and platinum ornaments.

4. Non-residents are allowed to open foreign currency accounts with any commercial bank in Thailand. As a special gesture to non-residents, no restrictions are imposed on the maintenance of and withdrawal from the account, as long as the funds originate from abroad.

5. Foreign visitors may convert Thai Baht into foreign currency for the purposes of outbound travel so long as they present evidence; such as, a currency exchange receipt, a valid airline ticket, and their passports to any major bank.

How to Get to Thailand

By Air

Bangkok is Thailand's major gateway. Most visitors arrive at Suvarnabhumi Airport because it is directly connected to Europe, Asia, North America and Australia by daily flights by the world's major airlines.

Further international flights, mainly from Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong, land at Phuket and Hat Yai International Airports in the South and Chiang Mai in the North.

By Rail

A regular rail service links Singapore and Bangkok via Kuala Lumpur and Butterworth in Malaysia. This service leaves daily and also connects with many major towns in South Thailand.

By Road

From Malaysia: it is possible to enter Thailand through a number of crossings in Songkhla, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces.

From Lao PDR: it is possible to enter Thailand through Nong Khai, Chiang Saen, Bueng Kan, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, and Chong Mek.

From Cambodia: it is possible to enter Thailand through Aranyaprathet in Sa Kaeo province, Ko Kong in Trat province, and Chong Chom in Surin province.

From Myanmar: it is possible to enter Thailand through Mae Sai and Mae Sot.

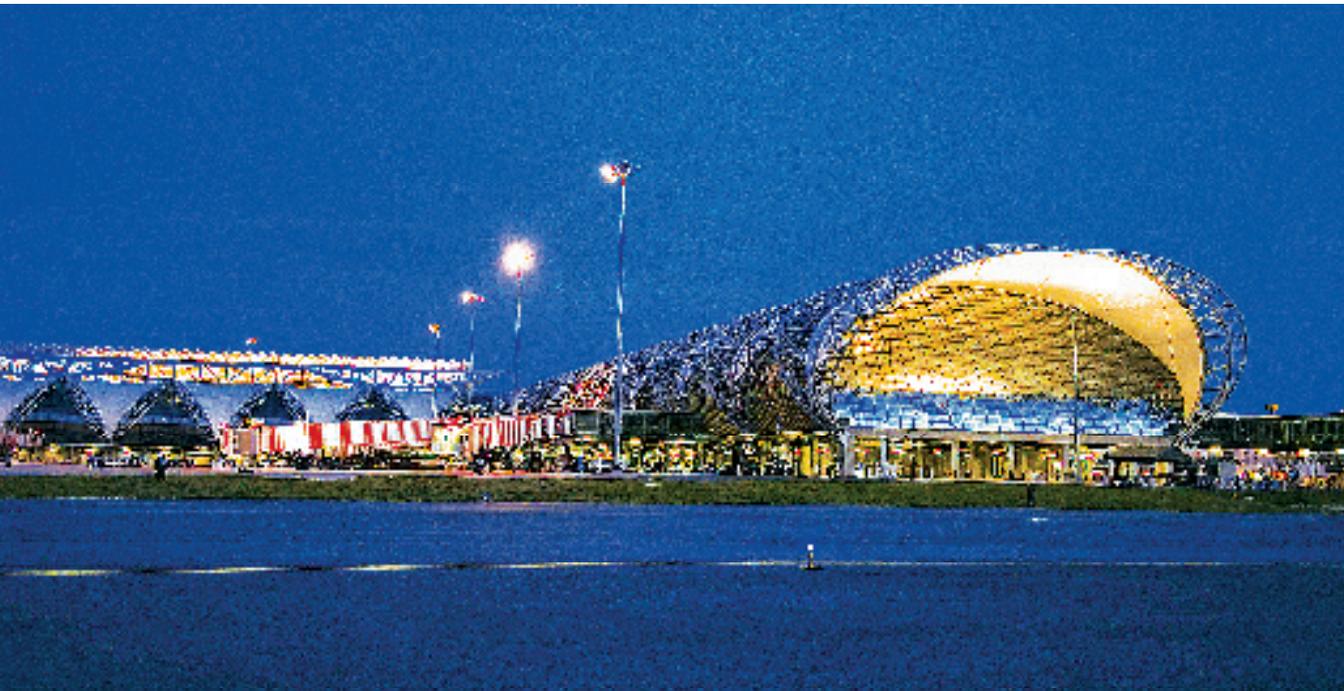
By Sea

There are no regular steamship connections to Thailand. Cargo ships calling at Bangkok's Khlong Toei Port sometimes have passenger cabin facilities.

Cruise ships: call at Laem Chabang Port (roughly 2 hours south of Bangkok) from Vietnam and Singapore. Please contact a travel agent for details.

Suvarnabhumi Airport

Suvarnabhumi Airport is the country's latest international airport. It is able to service 76 flights an hour, and up to 45 million passengers as well as three million tons of goods annually. Suvarnabhumi Airport is positioned to become the future aviation hub of South-East Asia. For more information, contact Tel. +66 2132 1888, +66 2132 1111-1722, or visit www.airportthai.co.th.



Railay Beach, Krabi





Thi Lo Su Waterfall, Tak



River Kwai Bridge, Kanchanaburi

Travel within Thailand

By Air

Flying in Thailand is both inexpensive and convenient. Several air carriers; such as, Thai Airways International (Tel. +66 2356 1111, www.thaiairways.com), Bangkok Airways (Tel. 1771, www.bangkokair.com), and a number of low-cost airlines; such as, Thai Air Asia (Tel. +66 2515 9999, www.airasia.com), Nok Air (Tel. 1318, www.nokair.com), and Orient Thai Airline (Tel. 1126 or +66 2015 2355 Ext. 401-4 www.flyorient-thai.com), fly to international and domestic airports in 26 cities throughout Thailand. Reservations may be made through airline offices, hotels, or travel agencies from overseas or upon arrival in Thailand.

Thai Airways organises Royal Orchid Holiday Tour packages. Further details may be obtained on Thai Airways' website at www.thaiairways.com.

By Rail

Rail journeys in Thailand are efficient, inexpensive, and comfortable. An extensive rail network serves Thailand using Bangkok as its hub. Three lines connect to Chiang Mai (Northern line), Nong Khai (North-Eastern line), and Singapore via Butterworth and Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia (Southern line). Recently, a rail line between Bangkok and Aranyaprathet on the Cambodian border was opened. Domestic express

trains comprise first, second, and third class carriages. Slower trains used on shorter journeys may only have third-class seating.

The State Railway of Thailand organises one and two-day economy tours to various destinations on weekends and holidays. Railway schedules can be obtained from Bangkok's main railway station at Hua Lamphong. Train tickets for all classes can be purchased 90 days in advance at principal stations and at the Advance Booking Office at Hua Lamphong from 8.30 a.m. - 4.00 p.m. Hotline: 1690 and www.railway.co.th

By Bus

A modern highway system stretches to all points of the country. Domestic air-conditioned buses are one of the most frequently used means of transport. Inexpensive and reliable, buses frequently leave from or stop at all major centres. There are three major bus terminals in Bangkok: Northern Bus Terminal on Kamphaengphet 2 Road. Tel. +66 2936 2852-66, Southern Bus Terminal on Pinklao-Nakhon Chaisi Road Tel. +66 2435 1199, and Eastern Bus Terminal on Sukhumvit Soi 62 Tel. +66 2391 2504. For more information, visit www.transport.co.th.



Tuk Tuk



BTS Sky Train

Travel Inside Bangkok

Public Transportation: public buses and air-conditioned buses are plentiful and inexpensive within metropolitan Bangkok. The red and grey air-conditioned minibuses are for longer urban journeys. A bus route map can be obtained from most hotels and bookshops.

Taxis and Tuk Tuks: hotel taxis have fixed fares. Public taxis are air-conditioned, comfortable, and have a starting fare of 35 Baht for the first 3 kilometres and approximately 5 Baht for every additional kilometre.

Tuk Tuks, three-wheeled taxis, are a symbol of Thailand. They are popular for short journeys and can cost anything from 30 Baht, depending on one's choice. Important: fares must be bargained for before the journey is undertaken as there is no meter.

Motorcycle Taxis: the fastest way to get through the traffic congestion of Thailand's major cities is by motorcycle taxi. Look for the driver with a coloured vest. Fares are negotiated before departure. Hold on tight.

River Taxis: there are many types of boats that navigate the Chao Phraya River in Bangkok. Private "cigarette long-tail boats" are fast and available for tours of the city's huge canal system. A 2-hour private tour costs about 500 Baht. Public river taxis run from dawn till dusk from Khlong Toei to as far north as Nonthaburi. The journey takes over an hour. Smaller trips between other landings can cost as little as 3 Baht.

Air Taxis: this is a special package tour which allows tourists to experience a beautiful view of Bangkok and the provinces nearby. For more information please contact Tel. +66 2504 3839-40 or visit www.royalsky.co.th

Skytrain: there are two lines in operation, the Sukhumvit Line and the Silom Line. BTS Skytrains run daily from 6.00 a.m. to midnight with frequent service throughout the day, particularly during rush hours. The fare is based on the distance travelled, starting at 16 Baht. For more information, please visit BTS Skytrain website at www.bts.co.th

Subway: the MRT Chaloem Ratchamongkhon Line has 18 stations and operates from 6.00 a.m. to midnight, and connects many of the top tourist attractions with the accommodation areas and business district. The fare is based on the distance travelled, starting at 16 Baht. For more information, please visit MRT website at www.bemplc.co.th

Airport Rail Link: the airport has two services. One is the "Express Line" that takes travellers from the Bangkok City Air Terminal (Makkasan Station) to Suvarnabhumi Station in 16 minutes and runs from 6.00 a.m. to midnight everyday. The fare for a one-way trip is 90 Baht and a return trip is 150 Baht. The other airport service is the "City Line" which takes travellers from Phayathai Station to Suvarnabhumi Station and stops at 6 stations along the way. This route also operates from 6.00 a.m. to midnight everyday and the fare is based on the distance travelled, starting at 15 Baht. For more information, visit : www.srtet.co.th

Canal Boats: Khlong Saen Saep canal boats operate from Banglamphu across the city to Ramkhamhaeng University. Tickets are bought on board and the fare is based on the distance travelled, starting at 9 Baht, Shorter trips between other landings can cost as little as 3 Baht. Please note that the piers are often difficult to find.



Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)

General Tourist Information

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), established for over 50 years, is responsible for the promotion of tourism to both Thai and international tourists in and around Thailand. Tourist information is available at the head office of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) in Bangkok, at TAT offices in major cities across the globe, and at the TAT counter at Suvarnabhumi Airport. They provide maps, brochures, and useful information on tours, shopping, dining, and accommodation.

TAT (www.tourismthailand.org) information offices are open daily from 8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. For the TAT

Call Centre Bangkok, Tel. 1672. This number is open from 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. seven days a week. From 8.00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. a voice menu is available, and a fax is sent to your hotel in answer to your questions. Operators manning the telephone speak English, Thai and Chinese.

Tourist Police

The Tourist Police was established to coordinate with TAT to provide safety for tourists. Its responsibilities include receiving and acknowledging claims and complaints, conducting investigations, and acting as coordinators of tourist security. There are hundreds of tourist police stationed at major tourist destination





The Assumption Cathedral, Bangkok

across Thailand including the Grand Palace, Phatphong, and Lumpini Park in Bangkok.

In case of emergency, please contact the Tourist Police Centre at 1155 or visit www.touristpolice.go.th

Business Hours

Most private offices in Bangkok operate on five-day a week from 8.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. Government offices are generally open between 8.30 a.m. and 4.30 p.m. Monday to Friday. Many major malls operate daily from 10.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m. Banks are open Monday to Friday between 9.30 a.m. and 3.30 p.m., except on public holidays. However, there are banks at shopping malls which operate everyday between 11.00 a.m. and 8.00 p.m. Major post offices are open Monday to Friday from 8.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. and Saturday to Sunday from 8.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.

Business Centres

Most major hotels provide fully equipped business centres for visiting executives. Services customarily include secretarial work, typing, photocopying, fax facilities, conference rooms, libraries, and internet access.

Car Rent

Travellers with a valid driver's license may choose to hire a car. English-language road signs and maps are commonplace. The Bangkok Yellow Pages lists local and international car hire companies. Each offers different conditions. Self-driven and chauffeur-driven cars are available.

There are several international car hire companies available in major tourist cities in Thailand; such as, Bangkok, Pattaya, Hat Yai, Phuket, Chiang Mai, and Ko Samui.

Religious Services

Buddhism temples can be spotted everywhere in Thailand. At these temples, visitors can observe Thai culture, beautiful architecture, and the people's devotion to Buddhism.

Christian churches are found in Bangkok and most provincial capitals. Services are mostly in Thai with some being held in English, French, and German. Local English-language newspapers provide comprehensive listings of services in Bangkok.

There are many Muslim mosques in Thailand as Thai-Muslims are free to teach and practise their religion according to their own tenets.



Clothing

Light, loose cotton clothing is best for Thailand's tropical climate. Sweaters are recommended when visiting the northern mountainous region and national parks during the winter season. When visiting Buddhist temples, please wear appropriate clothing and avoid wearing short pants/skirts and sleeveless shirts. Always remember to remove shoes before entering a temple.

Electricity

The electric current in Thailand is 220 volts AC (50 cycles) throughout the country. Various kinds of plugs and sockets are in use, but mostly consist of types with 2 flat blades or two circular pins, with an increasing number of types with two blades with a circular ground pin. Visitors are encouraged to purchase a 110-volt transformer or universal plug-adaptor kit in case shavers, chargers for electrical devices; such as, mobile phones and mp3 players, and other small appliances, are brought to Thailand. Most major hotels have these upon request.

Embassies

Some 50 countries maintain embassies, consulates, or legations in Bangkok. Most are concentrated around the Sukhumvit, Phloen Chit, Wireless, and Sathon Road areas.

Medical Services

Thailand has some of the best medical services of any country in Asia, and charges are lower than in Western countries. Private hospitals and government-run hospitals provide quick and efficient service to tourists, using world-class technological equipment. Well-trained doctors and nurses staff the hospitals and clinics, offering a five-star hotel level of service. In case of an emergency, an ambulance can be summoned from any private hospital.

Tipping

A 10-15% tip is customary in most restaurants and hotels, particularly where service charges are waived.



Bangkok Nightlife

Film and Photography

Thailand is endowed with numerous fascinating natural and historical attractions which provide opportunities for tourists to photograph and/or video. There are many excellent photo finishing laboratories and instant development can be done within the hour at most places. Still photographers are free to shoot anything unless notices state otherwise. Movie/video camera are not permitted in Bangkok's Grand Palace and Temple of the Emerald Buddha without special permission. Photography is also prohibited in certain sections of the National Museum. Companies interested in filming TV commercials, documentaries, music videos, TV programmes, movies, reality shows, mini-series, or TV dramas in Thailand can apply for a shooting permit, permission to work, and permission to film in National Parks and Historical Parks at the

Thailand Film Office. For more information, please contact the Thailand Film Office, Department of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Tel. +66 2219 4010-7 Ext. 462-463 or visit www.thailandfilmoffice.org.

Newspapers and Magazines

Thailand's two major English language dailies - The Bangkok Post and The Nation - are well respected newspapers. Major English newspapers and magazines; such as, the International Herald Tribune, Asian Wall Street Journal, Time, Newsweek, Untamed Travel, and the Far Eastern Economic Review, are available at major bookstores, department stores, supermarkets, and hotels throughout the country.



Replica Mailbox in front of Public Hall, Yala

Radio and Television

Visitors to Bangkok can listen to an English language radio station at FM 88, or listen online at www.radio.bangkok.net. However, there are several radio stations that are broadcasted in both English and Thai but present news and songs in English, such as FM 102.5, FM 105.5, and FM 107 (these stations are subject to change).

There are several cable and satellite TV providers with numerous channels broadcasting in English and other languages, showing a selection of news, movies, series, documentaries, entertainment, cartoons, and much more.

Temporary Import of a Vehicle for the Purpose of Tourism

Those wishing to temporarily import personal vehicles, such as a motor vehicle, motorcycle, yacht, sports boat, and/or fishing vessel, to Thailand for a short visit can do so. Vehicle owners are granted tax/duty relief provided that the vehicle is to be reexported within two to six months. Please thoroughly study the regulations and conditions as provided by the Custom Department of the Kingdom of Thailand at www.customs.go.th or call the customs hotline at Tel. 1164.

Things to remember while visiting Thailand

Thai people have a deep reverence for the Royal Family, therefore visitors should be careful to show respect for and not offend the King, the Queen, and/or any members of the Royal Family.

Places of worship; such as, temples and the Grand Palace, are considered holy and sacred grounds, thus it is important for visitors to respect them and behave accordingly. Avoid sleeveless shirts, short pants, and short skirts when visiting these places.

Buddha statues and Buddha images are religious objects, and visitors are expected to treat them with the utmost respect, and not lean on, sit on, touch, or point their feet towards them.

Women are not to touch Buddhist monks, the monks' robes, and are not allowed to hand any object directly to monks.

Shoes should be removed when entering temples and/or Thai homes.

Thais regard the head as the most respected part of the body whereas the feet are the least respected, therefore one should never touch a person's head and should not point the feet at anyone or anything.

Communication Services

Most hotels in Thailand offer international phone calls, facsimile (fax), internet, and e-mail services. Numerous private businesses, as well as cyber cafes, found everywhere throughout the country, offer the same facilities, most often in conjunction with translation services. A Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) card is now available for Thai and foreign customers travelling in Thailand. The SIM card must be used in conjunction with a Digital GSM mobile phone within the 900-MHz range or a Digital PCN

mobile phone within the 1800-MHz range. Major hotels provide basic postal services. Bangkok's central GPO on Charoen Krung (New Road) is open from 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m., Monday to Friday, and from 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. on Saturdays. Other post offices in Bangkok and those located in the provinces are generally open from 8.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. For more information, please contact Tel. +66 2831 3600 or visit www.thailandpost.com.



Dining

For Thais, rice is life and forms the centre of any meal. It is the soul of Thai cooking, whereas the essence of authentic Thai cuisine lies in its herbs and spices. Not only do these herbs add wonderful tastes and stunning aromas to the food, but they also give a tremendous therapeutic value to the diner's health. It is common to be served dishes that include hot, sour, sweet and salty flavours at one meal. A typical Thai meal includes soup, spicy salad, fish, rice, vegetables, and sometimes a meat dish, either pork, chicken, or beef.

Thai food can be found everywhere - street vendors selling noodles and BBQ, food courts or food centres in large shopping malls, traditional markets, open-air garden restaurants, riverside restaurants, dinner cruises along the Chao Phraya River, and seafood restaurants.

Thailand also provides a wide array of gourmet options for travellers from all walks of life. Asian cuisine; such as, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Indian,



or non-Asian cuisines, such as Italian, French, and Mediterranean, is prepared by experienced chefs from the food's countries of origin. Fusion food is becoming increasingly popular in Thailand and many Thai restaurants are now offering Western or Japanese dishes, laced with Thai flavours. On the other hand, several Western and non-Asian restaurants also have Thai-flavoured dishes on their menus.





Shopping

Thailand offers amazing shopping experiences to visitors, ranging from international and local luxurious goods to traditional and royal project handicraft products. The SUPPORT Foundation, initiated by H.M. Queen Sirikit, was developed to maintain the traditional art skills of the country as well as providing a better quality of life for local communities. Products made by these artisans can be seen at the Art of the Kingdom Museum (www.artsofthekingdom.com) located in the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall. Visitors who are interested in buying such products can find them at the Chitralada shops, an exclusive outlet for these goods, under royal patronage.

Each region of Thailand specialises in its own exquisite arts and crafts and features different types of products. Each province has an OTOP Centre which presents the local OTOP products, and you can also find OTOP products at major shopping malls in the country.

Amongst the most famous local handicraft products are wicker ware, Khon mask models, Bencharong hand-painted porcelain, and molded court dolls from the Central region, Matmi silk, Khit (raised embroidered) patterned cotton, and bamboo basketry from the Northeast, hill-tribe crafts, silverware, lacquer ware, Mo Hom fabric and clothes, hand-woven Chok embroidery-bordered textiles, and woodcarving products from the North, and Nang Talung (shadow play puppets), hand-woven Yan Liphao basketry, and a variety of practical and decorative items using coconut shells and rubber tree products from the South.

Packing and Shipping Services

Thanks to the ever-increasing number of tourists coming to Thailand, most shops are experienced at shipping abroad and are happy to attend to all required documents; such as, insurance, customs, and necessary permits. The Central Post Office also offers a parcel-wrapping service for those who want to make small shipments themselves. For larger shipments, there are a variety of international shipping companies.

Trading Opportunities

The Department of Export Promotion (DEP) (www.thaitrade.com), Ministry of Commerce, offers a permanent exhibition where quality products manufactured in Thailand are on display. The exhibition

features over 250 selected exhibitors with more than 10,000 items on display in three exhibition areas.

VAT Refund

A Value Added Tax (VAT) refund can be claimed by any non-Thai visitor who has been in Thailand less than 180 days in a calendar year, is not a crew member of an airline, and departs Thailand by air carrier from the international airports in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Hat Yai or Phuket. Rules and conditions apply. For more information, please visit www.rd.go.th







Khon or Thai Classical Masked Dance

Entertainment and Recreation

Entertainment

Thais are fun-loving people. Nationwide, boxing stadiums, race and golf courses, tennis and squash

courts, billiard halls, nightclubs, gourmet restaurants, discotheques, concert halls, teahouses, cocktail lounges, amusement parks, bars, museums, theatres, art galleries, traditional Thai massage centres, zoological gardens, and cinemas lure pleasure-seekers throughout the year.

Theatrical events in major cities across Thailand include traditional Thai dance and puppet performances, English and Thai-language dramas, musical performances, stage shows and concerts by Thai and visiting international artists. Major theatrical venues in Bangkok include the Thailand National Theatre, Thailand Cultural Centre, Siam Niramit, and Aksara Theatre. Theatrical venues in other provinces include Old Chiang Mai Cultural Centre, Phuket Fantasea, and Alangkarn Theatre in Pattaya.

Thailand's English-language newspapers carry daily listings of concerts, exhibitions, films, and theatre events. There are also dozens of free magazines offered throughout Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, Pattaya and Hua Hin that give great advice on how to occupy one's time. Progressive English language monthlies; such as, Metro and Untamed Travel, are available in bookstores and some hotel kiosks.



Thai Puppet Show



The King Rama IX Park



Queen Sirikit Park, Bangkok

Parks and Gardens in Bangkok

There are a variety of parks and gardens in Bangkok which are located near the bustling areas of Sukhumvit and Silom roads, providing green retreats for people to take a break from their busy lifestyle.

Lumphini Park at the northern end of Silom Road is popular amongst the keep-fit enthusiasts and families, whereas the beautifully landscaped Queen Sirikit Park, beside Emporium Shopping Mall, is famous for being the location at which wedding parties are photographed. Khao Din Zoological Garden or Dusit Zoo is a landscaped enclave with an artificial lake, and the King Rama IX Park is a park with botanical gardens established to honour H.M. King Bhumibol's 60th birthday at Sukhumvit Soi 103. Chatuchak Park, beside Chatuchak Weekend Market, is another popular park with wide-open green space.

Sports in Thailand

Thai Sports

Thai Boxing or Muay Thai: Muay Thai, along with football, is the most passionately followed sport in the country. Muay Thai is fought in five three-minute rounds with two-minute breaks in-between. A match is decided by a knockout or by points, determined by three judges. Thai boxing is featured throughout the week at Ratchadamnoen and Lumpini Stadiums. Fights usually begin around 6.00 p.m., with preliminary bouts featuring younger boxers, building up towards

the main event, usually around 9.00 p.m. At Lumpini Stadium, there is an emcee who announces all boxing matches in English. There are also many schools for Muay Thai established for those wishing to learn this unique self-defence art. Check with the Tourism Authority of Thailand at Hotline 1672 for fight stadiums and fight schedules, as well as Muai Thai courses.



Rajadamnern Boxing Stadium



Long Boat Racing Festival, Nan



International Kite Festival, Phetchaburi

Takro: Takro is similar to Western hacki sack. The sport is traditionally played in a loosely formed circle of people who use feet, knees, thighs, chests, and shoulders to acrobatically pass a woven rattan ball to each other, endeavoring to keep it airborne, and eventually kick it into a basket suspended above their heads. A modern version involves the use of a badminton net over which the rattan ball is knocked from team to team.

Kite Fighting: During the hot season, particularly March and April, opposing teams fly male Chula and female Pakpao kites in a battle of the sexes. The small,

agile Pakpao kite tries to fell the more cumbersome Chula, while the male kite tries to ensnare the female kite and drag it back into male territory.

Boat Racing: Regattas are featured as part of the country's fairs in many parts of Thailand to celebrate the end of the rainy season. The long, narrow boats are decorated with flags and flowers, crewed by paddlers and raced with great excitement. The most noteworthy races are held in Nan, Phichit, Nakhon Pathom, Surat Thani, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, and Pathum Thani.



Banyan Golf Club, Hua Hin

International Sports

Golf, football, boxing, badminton, tennis, squash, horse racing, motor sports, bowling, and snooker figure prominently among international sports enjoyed by Thais. A list of sporting venues can be obtained from Bangkok's English language Yellow Pages, on the Internet, or www.tourismthailand.org or TAT contact center 1672. Thailand also offers many water sports opportunities; such as, deep-sea fishing, sailing, scuba-diving, and snorkelling. Amongst the most popular spots for water sports are Pattaya, Hua Hin, and Phuket and other island sites. The coasts of the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea play host to dozens of world-class dive sites perfect for beginners and/or the most experienced diver.



Pattaya Boxing World, Chon Buri





Special Interests

Natural Healing and Buddhist Meditation

Matching body and mind to create a healthy equilibrium is a common task for Thais. This task is achieved through the practice of Buddhism featuring meditation and its important role in sustaining a healthy lifestyle.

Some of the main meditation centres include Suan Mok, a 120-acre forest temple in Amphoe Chaiya in Surat Thani province, some 600 kilometres south of Bangkok. This centre attracts meditators from all over the world. Meditation centres in Bangkok include Wat Mahathat (facing Sanam Luang), Wat Paknam, Wat Chonprathan Rangsarit, and Wat Bowon Niwet (in Banglamphu), in which instruction is given in English.

The Northern Insight Meditation Centre at Wat Ram Poeng (Tapotharam) is located at Tambon Suthep, Amphoe Mueang in Chiang Mai Tel./Fax. +66 5327 8620. This is one of the best known meditation centres

among tourists, and use English-speaking instructors and volunteers.

The centre offers a 26-day course in Vipassana (insight) meditation. If visitors cannot stay for the duration, a few days' study can be arranged, but beginners are advised to allow themselves five days to adjust to the practice. Instruction begins with an opening ceremony in which visitors pledge to follow the Eight Buddhist Precepts, which include only two meals a day. They are then given instruction and required to go to daily report sessions and personal meetings with a teacher to discuss their progress and receive further instructions. Foreign nationals are required to complete an application form and present a valid passport and visa for admission. All visitors must wear white. Proper clothing can be purchased at the temple's store. Meals and accommodation are provided at no charge. Donations are accepted but not required.



Spa



Spas and Beauty Treatment

Thailand is fast becoming the “health holiday” capital of the world. Some of the world’s finest spas are found in Thailand. Built in serene settings, often in lush gardens, wild jungles, or by the seaside, Thailand’s spas are rewriting the book on holistic philosophy. Treatments range from ancient Eastern healing and relaxation techniques to European rejuvenation therapies. Several leading hotels and resorts dedicated solely to healthy rejuvenation are located in Hua Hin, Phuket, and Ko Samui. Many smaller-scale facilities are found in all major cities across the country. While the up-scale resorts offer health and relaxation programmes that last for over a week, it is easy to drop in to a shop and get a foot massage, hand massage, neck and shoulder massage, and/or facials and skin treatments.



Traditional Thai Massage

Traditional Thai Massage

Thai massage is more a healing art than one of relaxation found in Western or Swedish style massage. In Thai massage, the massage specialist concentrates on pressure points across the body where an abundance of energy has built up. Releasing this energy and evenly distributing it across the body to create a balance is the basis of Thai massage.

Courses are taught principally at Bangkok's Wat Pho (www.watphomassage.com), home of traditional Thai massage and where most of the city's massage specialists are trained. Thai massage is also offered in Wat Mahathat and Wat Parinayok, both in Bangkok. There are many traditional Thai massage parlours across the country where one can receive many kinds of traditional massage, including oil, foot, hand, and head massages.

Experiencing the Thai Way of Life

To get the real taste of Thailand, community-based tourism is designed to take visitors on a wonderful experience of living and learning Thai culture and the Thai way of life. Homestay accommodation all over the country welcomes visitors with warm hospitality and a Thai smile, the country's signature. Visitors get the opportunity to enjoy living in a Thai house, learning the simple parts of the Thai language and social etiquette; such as, the "wai" - a Thai way of greeting - and the politeness and respect people have towards each other, especially to elders.

Visitors also get to appreciate the simple way of life that perfectly combines nature with unique tradition. Different regions of Thailand have different ways of life, depending on the natural resources and the culture, thus a hands-on experience of community-based tourism enables visitors to encounter Thailand and its people from a different perspective.





Bangkok

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