

# The Bangkok **Survivor's** Handbook

A guide to living  
in Asia's City of Angels  
- *and all Thailand* -

**Robert Hein**

## *About The Author*

I first visited Thailand in 1977 when, after several years of working as a yacht sailor in the South Pacific, I delivered a boat to Singapore and decided to do some overland travel for awhile.

I took the train from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur Malaysia. From there I caught a bus to the highland resort of Bukit Fraser and rented a room from an Indian family and settled down for a few weeks.

I had made no travel plans, just figured on following my instincts until the money ran out and then head for home, Hawaii. One afternoon in my host's living room I watched a TV program about a festival that included hundreds of people in colorful costumes, and elephants decked out in gold cloth parading through the streets. The broadcast was in Malay language so I couldn't understand what was being said but the gaiety, the pageantry, the joy of the event captivated me. I had never seen anything like it.

"Where is this festival?" I asked my host.

"Siam," he said, pronouncing it "See-am."

"Where is that?" Southeast Asian geography was not my strong point and I had never heard of See-am.

"It's the next country to the north," he answered.

"What is it like?"

"It is very cheap to live there, much cheaper than Malaysia," he said, "and the people are very friendly."

That was enough impetus to get me mentally packing my bags and a couple of days later I began the journey to "See am".

I took a combination of bus and train rides to the Malaysian-Thailand border city of Kota Bharu. There I walked across the border to Sungai Kolok, Thailand where I boarded a train to Bangkok.

The train passed rubber plantations, rice fields, limestone karsts, and gleaming Buddhist temples. My senses were completely saturated by the time I arrived in Bangkok the next morning, but there was more to come.

Bangkok pulsed with a vibrancy of life that I had never experienced, and although I'm a sensation junkie I got an overload just walking from the Hualumphong train station to the nearby Thai Sang Grit budget hotel.

I spent two months in the Kingdom before the money ran out and I returned to Hawaii, but I knew I would be back.

In 1981, I had completed another yacht delivery to Singapore and from there I took the express train to Bangkok. This time my future wife, who had been a member of the yacht's crew, accompanied me. We stayed for a couple of weeks in Bangkok before moving to Chiang Mai.

There we lived for three years, teaching English, exporting handicrafts and picking up writing and photography assignments. Next we moved to Pattaya where we bought a 35 foot catamaran and cruised around the Gulf of Thailand for 9 months. Then we sold the boat and returned to the US for a family visit.

In 1988 we returned to Bangkok and worked as freelance editors, writers and English teachers.

Living successfully in Bangkok is a matter of adjusting your attitude, exploring your imagination, and keeping an open mind. It may be complicated at times, but it is rarely boring if you look at the experience as an adventure and arm yourself with plenty of patience, tolerance, and goodwill.

Keep the positive energy flowing!

Robert Hein



*This e-book is especially  
prepared for the sailors  
and participants of the  
Sail Thailand Rally.*

*It is an abridged version of  
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*Farang* -- The generic name for  
Westerners in Thailand,  
pronounced “falang.”

*Expatriate* -- One who leaves their  
native land to live in a foreign  
country, an “expat.”







## *The Kingdom*

Thailand lies roughly in the center of Southeast Asia bordered by Cambodia to the east, Laos to the north, Burma to the west, and Malaysia to the south.

Unlike its neighbors, Thailand has never been colonized by a European nation although in the past it has ceded land to Britain in Malaysia and France in Cambodia. During World War Two it was occupied by the Japanese Army. Still, through all these events it remained free of foreign domination. This legacy of independence has united the country and spared it from internal strife as well as international threats.

As Thailand is central to Southeast Asia, so Bangkok is the political, cultural, commercial, and industrial hub of Thailand, but it wasn't always the capitol. Ayutthaya, a city sited on the Chao Phraya River 60 miles upstream from Bangkok, had reigned as the kingdom's capitol for more than 400 years. Trading vessels from Europe, China, and India called there to load cargoes of timber, rice, gemstones, silks and spices.

This thriving capitol maintained its dominance

until 1767 when it was captured during a long war with Burma. The invading army razed the city to the ground and it is recorded that out of one million inhabitants only 10,000 escaped death or enslavement. But during the siege of the city the Thai commander, General Phya Taksin, managed to dismantle the palace and transport the stones, along with his army's survivors, down the Chao Phraya River to the customs port of Thonburi, a village where he established the new capitol.

From there, General Taksin regrouped his army, resumed the war and drove the Burmese out of Thailand. He was subsequently crowned King and reigned for 15 years.

He was succeeded by Phya Chakri, who founded the Chakri Dynasty which has been in succession ever since. One of his first actions was to reestablish the capitol at a small village across the river from Thonburi. Here he began building the new city and named it Krung Thep Maha Nakorn, but this is only the first part of its full name which contains 165 letters. Thais call the city Krung Thep, which translates to "The City of Angels." Westerners use the name of the original village, Bangkok.

Since then, the rulers of the Chakri Dynasty have been very instrumental in the unification of the country. They instituted the Thai alphabet and the Buddhist canon, revitalized Thai literature and recorded history, redefined government services and raised the educational standards. The Thai people revere their kings and the monarchy has not been threatened by revolution with the exception of a bloodless coup in 1932 that replaced the absolute monarchy with a constitutional monarchy.

## *The Monarchy*

The current King, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), has ruled since 1946 and

maintains the responsibilities of caring for the health, welfare, and education of the Thai people. He personally travels throughout the country initiating public projects and providing on-site support and guidance. The royal family maintains a high profile, hands on leadership that has earned it the highest respect among the people.

Affronts against the monarchy are the least excusable blunders a foreigner can commit and are among the few that will make every Thai angry. Any word or action that is construed as being disrespectful towards the King or the royal family is certain to cause some level of resentment.



This respect extends to anything that bears the portrait of the King including currency, coins and postal stamps. Every unit of currency bears the image of the King and defacing, or tearing the bills is a criminal offence. Even

crumpling the bills into a wad is considered disrespectful.

One urban myth of expatriates says that postal clerks often remove stamps from letters mailed by foreigners in order to resell the stamps. The fact is that the clerks reattach them so that the portrait of the King is in an upright position when the stamps have been placed horizontally or upside down.

## ***Religion***

Although the overwhelming majority of Thais are Buddhists, religious tolerance is the policy of the kingdom and other faiths thrive here without a problem.

The Theravada School of Buddhism is the most dominant. This form recognizes the Buddha as the Great Teacher, not as a god. One of its most influential features is the pursuit of the Middle Way, the avoidance of extremes. This practice is apparent in the daily lives of Thai people and has earned Thailand the reputation of “the land of smiles” since outward displays of anger are looked on as being impolite and cause the enraged person to lose face, something no Thai wants to do.

For Thais, Buddhism is not a one day a week, weddings, births, and funerals religion. They practice the rituals of Buddhism daily, in private and in public. Practically every home and business maintains a small shrine where the spirit of Buddha or another influential person is invited to reside. In one office where I worked was a small shrine with a picture of King Chulalongkorn who reigned from 1868 to 1910. Every morning, as soon as she entered the office, the Thai owner of the company placed a small garland of flowers at the shrine, lighted a few incense sticks then meditated for five minutes in front of it with her hands pressed in a *wai*. Does it work? I have known her for years and her prosperity has increased significantly without sacrificing her peace of mind and that, she told me, was her objective.



### ***Spirit Houses***

Whenever a plot of land is occupied by a house or business a miniature temple is mounted on a pedestal somewhere on the grounds. This is the place reserved for the spirit of the land

that is being occupied. Its location is selected according to certain procedures and the dedication is presented by monks. This is not “just in case” insurance. Thais firmly believe that spirits are part of the universe and regularly stop at spirit houses to light incense sticks, meditate for a few minutes, and leave small offerings. In one hotel, I could see the spirit house from the coffee shop and in the mornings I watched as the day shift came to work. Each person would stop at the spirit house, light a few incense sticks and pay respects to the spirit, then head for the time clock.

The Erawan Shrine at the intersection of Rajadamri and Ploenchit roads began as a spirit house. Over the years it has gained a reputation for bringing good fortune to its supplicants and is highly regarded. The spirit house has been replaced with a large image of Erawan, the three headed elephant of Bhrama. Vendors selling incense sticks, candles and flower garlands line the nearby sidewalks. In the center of the shrine the image is surrounded by these offerings as well as numerous carvings of elephants. People pay homage to the spirit by commissioning classical Thai musicians and



colorfully costumed dancers to perform there. This shrine is very popular and said to have great power to grant wishes. People walking by, and others whizzing past in a bus or car, bow their head slightly and hold a wai reverently to their lips.

### ***Buddhist Monks***

At some time in his life, almost every Thai male will become a monk and wear the saffron colored robes. He may spend several weeks, months, years or the remainder of his life as a Buddhist monk and live according to 227 monastic rules, including celibacy and abstinence from alcohol. He is not allowed to work, raise food or have a bank account. Everything he needs in life must be provided through the generosity of the people. Each morning, monks walk through the sois carrying alms bowls and people come out to offer food because they “gain merit” by doing so.



The monks take their vows seriously and expect foreigners to respect them. Monks are forbidden to touch or be touched by a woman. Even when the contact is accidental it's considered as a great loss of merit. At a temple, I once saw a foreign couple in a relaxed conversation with a monk when something the monk said caused the woman to reach out and pat his shoulder. The monk's mouth dropped open in astonishment, then his face wrinkled up into a tight grimace and he quickly excused himself.

On the bus a woman should never sit next to a monk. When a monk boards a bus or train that has no vacant seats someone will give up their seat and women will move to avoid any contact.

### ***Temples (wats)***

Buddhist wats are open to everyone but you must dress and behave respectfully when you visit. They are beautiful and fascinating religious temples not museums or theme parks. Don't wear a bathing suit or go shirtless or shoeless. Women should cover their legs and wear modest blouses. Do not sit or lean on statues of Buddha. Taking photos is permitted but use discretion when posing.

My first visit to a temple occurred one Sunday morning when I took the ferry to Wat Arun, the capital's oldest wat on the Thonburi side of the river. I wandered around the quiet compound, taking photos of the buildings, when a monk approached and spoke to me in English. He asked the usual where are you from, do you like Thailand, have you eaten today questions. When I said, no, he invited me to lunch so I removed my shoes and followed him into a building where a dozen monks sat on the floor eating their last meal of the day. I was given a bowl of shrimp curry, then sat on the floor and visited for a couple

of hours. The monks relaxed after lunch, reading and talking quietly among themselves.

### **Wat Arun, Temple of the Dawn**

Located on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River.

To get there, take the cross river ferry from Tha Tien, Tha Wanif Road near Wat Pho.

This wat was established by King Taksin during the period when Thonburi was the capitol. The pagoda stands 240 feet high and the panoramic view of the river and city is worth climbing the steps to the top. Viewed from the Bangkok side of the river this temple glows in the morning sunlight and displays an impressive silhouette at dusk.

### **Wat Pho, The Reclining Buddha**

At the intersection of Chetuphon and Maharaj Roads. A short walk south from the Grand Palace.

One of the oldest and largest temples in Bangkok, it was founded by the early Chakri kings as a center of public education. It contains the Reclining Buddha, a gold plated image 150 feet long and 10 feet high. It is the headquarters of the Traditional Medicine Practitioners of Bangkok.

### **Wat Saket, Temple of The Golden Mount**

Located between Ratchadamnoen Klang and Boripihat roads.

The Golden Mount is a man made hill, the only hump in Bangkok. Wat Saket is sited at the bottom of the mount and a magnificent chedi crowns its summit.

### **Wat Traimit, Temple of The Golden Buddha**

On Traimit Road near Yaowarat Road at the eastern edge of Chinatown.



This temple contains an image of a seated Buddha, 10 feet high, weighing nearly six tons and cast in solid gold.

## ***Chinese Temples***

### **Lao Ben Dou Gug Temple, Taoist**

In Chinatown close to Sampeng Lane and the Tha Ratchawong boat landing.

### **Leng Noi Yee, Chinese Buddhist**

In Chinatown on Charoen Krung Road.

This ornate temple is often used as a setting by movie and television companies.

## ***Indian Temples***

### **Phra Sri Maha Uma Devi Temple, Hindu**

On Silom Road near Pan Road.

Built in the 1860s and colorfully decorated facade of Indian deities.

### **Sri Gurusingh Sabha, Sikh**

Located off Chakraphet Road in the Pharuhat area on the western side of Chinatown.

## ***Christian Churches***

### **Assumption Cathedral**

23 Oriental Lane  
Tel.: 02 234 8556

Long established Catholic Church. Sunday English sermon at 10am

### **Bangkok Ekamai Church**

57 Soi Charoenchai, Ekamai Rd.  
Tel.: 02 391 3593

### **Christ Church**

11 Convent Rd.  
Tel.: 02 234 3634

Anglican and Episcopalian; Sunday English service at 8am, 10am and 6pm

**Calvary Baptist Church**

88 Soi 2 Sukhumvit Rd.  
Tel.: 02 251 8278

**Evangelical Church**

Soi 10, Sukhumvit Rd.  
Tel.: 02 251 9539

**Fellowship Baptist Church**

2172/146 Soi 26, Paholyothin Rd.  
Tel.: 02 579 8764

**Holy Redeemer Church**

123/19 Soi Ruam Rudi  
off Wireless Rd, behind US Embassy  
Tel.: 02 253 0305

Catholic; weekday English masses at 7am, 8am and 5:30pm Sunday English sermon at 8:30am, 9:45am, 11am and 5:30pm

**International Church**

67 Soi 19, Sukhumvit Rd.  
Tel.: 02 253 3353  
Pastor's residence, Tel.: 02 253-2205.

Interdenominational congregation of the Church of Christ. Sunday English mass at 8am

**Saint John's**

Hayaek Lard Prao, Viphavadi Rangsit Rd.  
Tel.: 02 513 4286

Catholic; Sunday English mass at 10am

**Seventh Day Adventist Church**

Soi 17, Sukhumvit Rd.  
Tel.: 02 391 3593 Ext 56 (church), Ext 54 (pastor)

# *General Data*

## *Population and Economy*

Thailand has around 60 million citizens and Bangkok's population is estimated to be 6.5 millions. Its greatest growth occurred over the past 30 years as manufacturing bases grew around the capitol and people migrated from the farms to the city for employment.

The nation is a major player not only in the Asian economies but also those of the Near East, Europe, and the Americas. Sixty eight countries maintain embassies in Bangkok reflecting the diversity of the foreign community that is established here.

Massive foreign investment coupled with the energetic Thai work force has shifted the country's economic base from 80% agricultural to one where manufacturing now accounts for nearly 30% of the Gross Domestic Product and the services industry contributes nearly 50% while agriculture has dropped to 11%.

In the early 1990s Thailand was on the fast track to becoming a new "Asian Tiger" with an annual economic growth rate averaging 8% up to 1997 when the Asian economic boom went bust. Then the Thai baht, which was valued at 25 to the US dollar, sunk to nearly 50 to the dollar. To its credit, the government instituted a policy of fiscal restraint that held the value of the baht steady at 40 to the USD, but without stopping its vital infrastructure projects. The Bangkok Skytrain began service in 2000 and a subway system opened in 2004. In addition, construction continues on a second international airport and other public projects.

## ***The Government***

The King is the Head of State and the Armed Forces. He exercises legislative power through the Council of Ministers and judicial power through the Courts of Law.

The National Assembly and the Senate are elected by popular vote and although political power struggles occur at this level the King retains absolute power and acts as the ultimate mediator if the factions are disrupting or endangering the welfare of the Kingdom.

## ***Climate***

Newcomers to Bangkok often describe the yearly climate as having only two seasons, the wet and the dry, both of them hot.

The dry season runs from November to May. This is the northeast monsoon with clear skies and weak, variable winds. The rainy season runs from June through October. But the discriminating expatriate has discovered a third season, the cool season from November through February with clear skies and cool nights.

### **Average Rainfall and Temperature**

Jan	1 in	32C	90F
Feb	1 in	34C	90F
Mar	1 in	35C	85F
Apr	1 in	36C	97F
May	7 in	34C	93F
June	6 in	33C	91F
July	6 in	32C	90F
Aug	8 in	32C	90F
Sept	13 in	32C	90F
Oct	5 in	32C	90F
Nov	2 in	31C	88F
Dec	0 in	31C	88F

## ***Monsoons***

Thailand's weather is dictated by the monsoons. These are wind systems that are regulated by the sun's location north or south of the equator.

The southwest monsoon occurs from May to October. During this period the sun heats up the Asian land mass and creates a low pressure area that is filled by the relatively cooler, high pressure air coming from the Indian Ocean. This air mass brings moisture laden clouds that dump their loads over Southeast Asia. These showers are usually not long lasting but occur almost daily and can deposit several inches of rain in just a few hours.

The northeast monsoon is the opposite. From November to May the sun's heat creates a low pressure area in the Indian Ocean and the relatively cooler, high pressure air from the Asian land mass flows southwest to fill the low, but it carries few clouds.

The changes in the monsoons can be seen by the movement of the cloud masses. During the wet monsoon the clouds march northwards for a few months, then slow down and stop. After a few weeks they begin their retreat to the south, leaving the sky clear for the months of the dry monsoon.

## ***Currency***

The unit of Thai currency is the baht and is denoted by the letter "B" with a "/" (slash) through it. The denomination is printed in both Thai and Arabic numerals. Each denomination of bill is a different color and size. The larger the denomination the larger the bill. The denominations are 20 baht (green), 50 baht (blue), 100 baht (red), 500 baht (purple), and 1000 baht (grey).

For coins, there is a 10 baht coin which is silver with a brass center, and silver 5 baht and 1 baht coins. There are also small, brass coins for 50 and 25 satang (100 satang = 1 baht). All currency bears the image of the King.

## *Calendar*

Although Thailand has adjusted its calendar to begin a new year at the same day as Western countries, the years are still counted as Buddhist Era (B.E.), not as Anno Domini (A.D.).

The Buddhist Era began 543 years before the Christian era making the year 2000 A.D. into the year 2543 B.E. Both systems are used in Thailand with the postal department and government institutions adhering to the Buddhist Era dates while banks and commercial entities use the Christian Era dates. But other than being half of a millennium ahead the Thai calendar is synchronized with the Western calendar.

The Thai government offices will be closed on the following holidays.

## *Holidays*

01 Jan	New Year's Day
Jan Feb	Chinese New Year
08 Feb	Makha Bucha
06 Apr	Chakri Day
13 Apr	Songkran, Thai New Year
01 May	Labor Day
05 May	Coronation Day
06 May	Ploughing Ceremony
07 May	Wisakha Bucha
05 July	Asanha Bucha
06 July	Khao Phansa
12 Aug	Queen's Birthday
23 Oct	Chulalongkorn Day
05 Dec	King's Birthday
10 Dec	Constitution Day

# *Language*

The biggest difficulties for Westerners in learning Thai language are the five tones and the short or long vowel sounds that denote the meaning of the word. Since Western languages do not use these characteristics it takes ear training to distinguish the word being used. For example, the word *mai* can mean new, silk, no, or burn depending on the length of the vowels and whether the tone is high, low, neutral, rising, or falling. An effective way to train your ear to recognize the tones and vowel lengths is by listening to Thai language course tapes or CDs and repeat the lessons aloud.

The grammar is simple since verbs are not conjugated, everything is present tense, and nouns use only the subjective case. If you study Thai regularly for one hour each day you could have enough vocabulary and listening skills in six months to see you through most of your daily needs.

The alphabet is written in a form of Sanskrit and has more characters than English but it is still manageable for Westerners. Learning to read and write the language will greatly help you to learn the pronunciation and tones of the words and is best done with the books and flash cards that are used to teach school children.

The pronunciation for Thai vowels is the same as do, re, mi, fa, with “u” as in tune. But while vowels are always sounded, many Thai words are written using consonants that are not pronounced.

Rules for the spelling of Thai words in English have been established by the Royal Institute and used on street signs and official publications but many variations are found on maps, business cards, brochures, and advertisements. Quite often the spelling changes. When you are trying to communicate street names with Thais, put the accent on the last syllable, if that doesn't get through, put it on the first syllable.

On one of my first excursions into the city, I became disoriented, not really lost since after an hour of wandering through the sois near the Royal Hotel, I ended up next to some government buildings shown on my map. But I didn't know where my objective was in relation to them. It's easy finding the general area where your destination is located but then it often becomes a matter of finding a soi, a sub soi, and then an alley that leads to the place you are looking for. I was standing on the sidewalk studying the map when a Thai woman walked out of a building and headed my way. She wore a government officer's uniform, a brown skirt and blouse with service ribbons pinned above the breast pocket. I'll ask her, I thought to myself.

I prepared the Thai words in my mind and when she got close I said, "Excuse me," in Thai. Then, with my dictionary in hand I launched into a convoluted, ill pronounced query, interrupted by dictionary word searches, asking her if she knew where my destination was located.

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She looked at me like I was from outer space then, without changing her expression, said in perfect English, "Sometimes I can't understand my own language. How can I help you?"

On the other hand, there will be times when understanding English can be tricky. Keep in mind that "Rs" are "Ls" (load for road), and "Ls" can be pronounced as "Rs" or "Ns". The California university U.C.R.A. is one example, while Nepal is pronounced Nepan and bill is pronounced bin. When you want to pay your bill in a hotel or restaurant ask for the "chek bin."

To learn Thai language you can attend classes in language schools, hire a teacher for one on one sessions, trade English lessons for Thai lessons, or set up a home study course for yourself.

I began my Thai language lessons 20 years ago when I lived in Chiang Mai teaching English at the



American University Alumnae Language School (AUA). One of the teachers mentioned that he was taking Thai lessons from a retired lady who had worked 10 years for the US Air Force and spoke North American English, fluently. I started with her as well and three times a week we went to her house for one hour sessions. The cost was very reasonable and she was an experienced teacher who started me on the AUA Thai Course. I have also traded English lessons for Thai lessons but this method has its caveats. Once, while talking to a street vendor I asked him how to say “shirt” in Thai. He replied “Su, su, sua.” I thought it was one of those multiple words like “hula hula” and walked away from him repeating “Su, su, sua.” Another vendor, a friend of mine, called me over. “Khun Bob,” he said, “do not learn Thai from that man, he stutters.”

### ***Learning Thai***

There are numerous Thai language schools located in the city and suburbs offering courses that can be set to the speed at which you wish to learn. There are also several online Thai courses offered on the Internet you can find them by searching for Thai language instruction in your web browser. Below is a list of schools that are recognized for their professional approach and progressive curriculum.

#### **AUA Natural Thai**

179 Rajadamri Rd., Lumpini  
Tel.: 02 252 8170 Ext 399  
Website: [www.auathailand.org](http://www.auathailand.org)  
[75061.2151@compuserve.com](mailto:75061.2151@compuserve.com)

The “Natural Method,” listening to Thais in conversation, is taught here. Course books for home study are available from the bookstore located on the ground floor.



# *Need To Know*

Preparations for moving to Bangkok are essentially the same as those required for visiting the city. You need a passport, visa, money, and an air ticket. The biggest difference between moving and visiting are the things you ship.

## *Air Travel*

Asian airlines such as JAL, Korean Air, Eva Air, China Air, Thai Air, and Singapore Air serve Bangkok more frequently than US carriers. If you live in a city with a Thai or Asian community check their ethnic newspapers for travel agents. These usually offer the lowest fares.

While travel agents may tell you otherwise, you can enter Thailand on a one-way air ticket, a return or ongoing air ticket is not required. This saves you from having several hundred dollars invested in an air ticket that you may not use since you can leave the country by train or motor coach as well as by air. Furthermore, the air fares from Thailand are very competitively priced, not only to the US but Europe as well.

## *Money*

How much money you need to bring depends on your life style. You can have a comfortable standard of living for US\$700-1000 a month for rent and food. If you are a careful, not miserly, money manager you can get by for much less.

If you are planning on staying in Thailand for awhile, bring enough money to cover your estimated expenses

for two months. By then you will have an apartment where you receive mail.

A Bangkok mail address is generally required to open a bank account and process international, electronic transfers of funds using credit cards or debit cards is possible through Thai banks.

Before you leave your home country, ask your bank about their procedures for transferring money to Thailand. See the chapter on Banking for more details.

## ***What To Bring***

Everything you need to setup your base is available in the city but there are a few things you may want to bring with you.

- √ Sport shoes in large sizes are hard to find and expensive. Custom made, leather shoes and boots are available at very reasonable prices.
- √ The electrical current in Thailand is 240 volts so any US appliances you bring will require voltage adaptors. They are available at Central department stores for around US\$10.
- √ Sports equipment is expensive in Thailand. Bring your tennis racquets, golf clubs, scuba gear or other specialized sports accessories.
- √ Batteries for electronic goods are available but some are hard to find and expensive. Bring spares of any special batteries that you require.
- √ Personal computers and accessories are allowed into the country duty free. Your computer can be used on either 110 or 240 volts by a selector switch that is usually located on the back of the computer.
- √ Bring your college diploma, transcripts or

any other certificates that will qualify you for a job or lend credibility to your experience.

- √ Bring reference letters, written on company letterhead stationery, from previous employers or business associates.

## ***Shipping Household Items***

The least expensive method for shipping household items is sea freight. The shipping time is about one month from the date of loading at a US west coast port.

Entry through Thai Customs is no problem if you print out an itemized list of the contents in the shipment.

For sending books, the United States Post Office has the M Bag, a special rate for books sent overseas. You can obtain the M Bag, shipping labels and packing instructions from your local Post Office. The shipping time from the USA to Bangkok is two months.

The freight companies of DHL and FedEx have offices in Bangkok and offer secure, fast shipping services.

Some international movers and freight companies refuse household consignments or require a lot of red tape. Below is a freight consolidator who is very experienced in shipments to Thailand.

### **Executive Technical Transport Ltd.**

20036 19th Ave. NE, Suite 200  
Shoreline, WA, 98158  
Tel.: (206) 363 7447  
Fax: (206) 363 7449  
E-mail: rocky@shipette.com

This is an experienced, reliable shipper who frequently ships to Bangkok. Client list includes Dell Computers, Department of Defense, US Embassy.

## *Passport Requirements*

- √ Your passport must be valid for at least six months from the date the visa is issued, and it must contain blank pages for visa stamps. If necessary, renew your passport or have blank pages inserted.
- √ If your passport expires while you are in Thailand you may renew it at the Consular Section of the US Embassy in Bangkok.
- √ You must have a valid passport at all times. To be without one is to invite fines and imprisonment.
- √ You will need to show your passport when entering and exiting the country and when you cash traveler's checks, open a bank account, rent a hotel room or apartment.
- √ Thai law requires that every foreigner show proof of a valid passport and visa when requested by Thai authorities. You can fulfill this requirement by making photocopies of the identification and the visa pages of your passport and carrying them with you.
- √ When you must carry your passport with you keep it on your person so that it is always with you in case of accident or loss of a backpack or shoulder bag. The most secure place to stow it is in a money belt worn under your shirt.

## *Lost Passport Procedure*

Report a lost or stolen passport immediately to the Tourist Police where English speaking personnel will assist you. **Tourist Police Tel: 1155**

File a report at the police station in the area where the passport was lost or stolen. Take a

copy of this report to the American Consulate in Bangkok and apply for a new passport. Include the following documents with your application:

- √ A copy of the police report of a lost or stolen passport.
- √ Proof of identity; a driver's license or other photo ID is sufficient.
- √ Proof of citizenship; for example a photocopy of the lost passport, an expired passport, a naturalization certificate, a birth certificate, or a sworn statement from a US citizen affirming your identity.
- √ Two, recent 2 x 2 inch (5 x 5 cm) identical photographs in color with a light, plain background.
- √ A passport fee in cash or traveler's checks.

Present these documents to the consular section of your country's embassy in Bangkok.

Finally, you will need to visit the Thai Immigration Bureau to have your visa re-stamped. Bring the following documents:

- √ Passport or substitute document provided by your country's Consulate.
- √ The police report of a lost or stolen passport.
- √ A document from your country's Consulate certifying the new passport.
- √ Present these documents to:

**Thai Immigration Bureau**

Section 4 (Record & Statistics) Subdivision 4  
Immigration Bureau Room 311 Old Building  
Soi Suan Phlu, South Sathorn Rd.  
Tel.: 02 287 3911 Ext. 2244

# *Visa Requirements*

A visa is a permit to enter the country. Currently, US citizens may arrive in Thailand without one and be granted a 30-day visa at the port of entry. But for a longer visa you will need to apply at a Thai Consulate office outside of the kingdom before you arrive. You can do this in person or by mail and visa applications can be obtained from the Consulate or by downloading a copy from the Thai Consulate website. The visa approval process is usually completed in one day if you submit it in person, or one week by mail. The following requirements for submitting a visa application were valid at the time of printing (Dec 07) but are subject to change without notice so you should visit the Thai Consulate website for the most recent instructions.

## *Thai Consulates in The US*

Thai Consulates are located in many US cities. Below are listed three, main consulates. The Consulate website provides the other locations.

### **Royal Thai Consulate-General, Los Angeles**

611 North Larchmont Blvd., 2nd Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90004  
Tel.: (323) 962-9574-77 Fax : (323) 962-2128  
E-mail : Thai-la@mindspring.com  
Website : [www.Thai-la.net](http://www.Thai-la.net)

### **Royal Thai Consulate-General, Chicago**

700 North Rush St. Chicago, IL 60611  
Tel.: (312) 664-3129 Fax : (312) 664-3230  
E-mail: [Thaichicago@aol.com](mailto:Thaichicago@aol.com)

### **Royal Thai Consulate-General, New York**

351 East 52nd St., New York, NY 10022  
Tel.: (212) 754-1770 Fax: (212) 754-1907  
E-mail: [Thainycg@aol.com](mailto:Thainycg@aol.com)



# ***Visa Procedures***

There are three classifications of visas; the one-month Transit Visa, the two-month Tourist Visa, and the three-month Non-immigrant visa. For the most recent updates of changes made to visa and immigration policies visit the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs website [www.mfa.go.th](http://www.mfa.go.th)

## ***Tourist Visa -- Category TR***

### **For Tourism (Pleasure) Purposes Only**

#### **Validity of visa**

The validity of visa is 3 months.

#### **Period of stay**

Travelers with this type of visa will be permitted to stay in Thailand for a period not exceeding 60 days at any time.

#### **Required documents**

- 1 Your actual passport -- It must have at least 6 months validity and contain at least one completely empty visa page.
- 2 One copy of passport picture page.
- 3 Application form -- completed and signed by the applicant (parents can sign for the minor).
- 4 Two photos -- Passport-type photo, 2" x 2", color, front-view, taken within 6 months. Write your full name on the back of each photo.

#### **Fee**

The visa fee is US\$25 per entry, up to two entries.

If you apply in person, the fee must be paid in CASH only.

When you apply by mail, the fee must be paid

in the form of MONEY ORDER or CASHIER'S CHECK only payable to "ROYAL THAI CONSULATE GENERAL (location)". Personal or company checks are NOT acceptable.

When you apply by mail, a self-addressed stamped envelope with sufficient postage (Express Mail /or FEDEX) must be included for the return of passport.

### ***Non-immigrant Visa***

This visa is the base upon which all permits are issued. The regulations for obtaining this visa are listed below and were posted on the Thai Consulate website on August 05. The interpretation is solely up to the Thai Consulate Officer who looks at you and your application. He has only a few minutes to make a judgment call.

On a recent visa run to Penang, I met an American who was applying for a Retirement Visa. He had only recently retired and moved to Pattaya. There he began collecting the documents required for the Retirement Visa.

"The Immigration Bureau and my expat friends told me what paperwork I needed," he said. He should have also checked the Thai Consulate website for details.

In Georgetown, we shared a taxi to the Thai Consulate where he handed in his application and I listened in.

The Consulate officer leafed through the documents, "Where is your current bank statement?" He glanced at the man, then back to the papers. "You do not have a police background report, either."

These questions caught the man off guard. It was his first time doing this. "No one told me that these papers were required," was the best reply he could muster.

His request for a Non-immigrant Visa (Type OA) was denied.

The man didn't want to hear this. "I've been on a train for 24 hours to get here!" He said this as though he was answering a summons from the Consulate. "My friends in Pattaya said I had all I needed to get this visa."

The Consulate officer was unimpressed. He hears this sort of whining all day long, and in several languages, but his training kept him courteous. He spoke English fluently and told the man to go to the US Consulate in Bangkok where he can obtain a document verifying his bank account funds.

"Why do I need a police background check? I've never been in trouble in my life," the man said in a tone edged with resentment.

"Then you should have no problem obtaining one," the officer said.

Keep in mind that the Consulate officers are there to insure that the requirements of the Immigration Department are fulfilled. If you are turned down, don't argue with the Consulate officers. They are not the enemy. Instead, use your time at the window to ask questions and gain more information about your visa request process.

### **Visa Limitations**

This visa will not be issued for purposes of tourism, seeking employment, looking for a school for teaching or studying.

The Consulate will consider the application on a case-by-case basis and may request additional documents.

### **Validity of Visa**

A single-entry visa is valid for three months.

The multiple-entry visa is valid for one-year.

### **Period of Stay**

This type of visa permits a stay in Thailand up to 90 days per entry.

## **Extension of Stay**

Application forms for an extension of permit to stay in Thailand are submitted to the Immigration Bureau 507 Soi Suan Plu Sathorn Tai Road, Bangkok. On applying, a guarantee is required in any form, deemed proper, by the Immigration authorities such as a cash deposit of US\$250, a letter of guarantee from the commercial bank or a title deed in Thailand valued at not less than US\$250.

## **Fee**

Single-entry, US\$50

Multiple-entry US\$125

## ***Non-immigrant Visa Types***

This visa is granted in accordance with specified reasons for the visit to the Kingdom. Here is a listing of acceptable categories for the Non-immigrant Visa.

### **Business Visa – Type B**

*For The Purpose of Conducting Business and Conference (not including employment)*

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### **Required Documents**

- 1 Your passport - must be valid for at least 6 months with at least one completely empty visa page.
- 2 One copy of Passport - the picture page.
- 3 One application form - available from the consulate or downloaded from the Thai Consulate website: [www.Thai-la.net](http://www.Thai-la.net)
- 4 Two photos — 2" x 2", color, front-view, taken within 6 months. Write your name on the back.
- 5 An original letter of invitation on company letterhead from the business host in Thailand to the visa applicant stating the objective of the visit to Thailand.

- 6 A letter from the company to the Consulate stating the objective of the visit to Thailand.
- 7 A copy of the host's Business Registration and Business license which is issued by the Department of Commercial Registration and certified by the Department.
- 8 A copy of the host company's profile.
- 9 A list of shareholders of the business host.
- 10 Any documents showing correspondence between visa applicant and trading partners in Thailand.

## **Work Visa — Type B**

*For The Purpose Of Employment*

### **Required documents**

1. Your passport - it must be valid for at least 6 months and contain at least one completely empty visa page.
2. One copy of the passport picture page
3. One application form - available from the consulate or downloaded from the Thai Consulate website: [www.Thai-la.net](http://www.Thai-la.net).
4. Two photos — 2" x 2", color, front-view, taken within 6 months. Write your name on the back.
5. The approval letter from the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare.
  - a) The employer of the applicant must first apply for and receive the approval letter for the applicant's employment through Department of Employment, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, Mit-Maitree Rd. Dindaeng, BKK 10400 Tel. (662) 617-6578 Fax. (662) 617-6576.
  - b) In case of up-country, the employer may

apply through the District Office or the Province Office. When the approval letter has been granted, the applicant will submit this approval with his/her visa application.

6. An original letter of invitation on company letterhead from the business host in Thailand.
7. Employment contract indicating rationale for hiring the applicant as well as his/her salary, position and qualification.
8. A copy of details of business operation of business host in Thailand.
9. Balance sheet, Statement of Income Tax and Business Tax (Por Ngor Dor 50 and Por Ngor Dor 30) of the past 2 years.
10. A copy of work permit issued by the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare for applicants who previously worked in the Kingdom.

## **Student Visa — Type ED**

*For The Purpose Of Studying*

### **Required documents**

1. Your passport - it must be valid for at least 6 months and contain at least one completely empty visa page.
2. One copy of the passport picture page.
3. One application form - available from the consulate or downloaded from the Thai Consulate website: [www.Thai-la.net](http://www.Thai-la.net).
4. Two photos — 2" x 2", color, front-view, taken within 6 months. Write your name on the back..
5. An original letter of acceptance from the concerned accredited school, university or institution.

- a) For the purpose of teaching or studying in private schools or colleges you must receive approval from the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of University Affairs.
- b) The institution must apply for your approval as a foreign teacher or student through the Office of the Private Education Commission.
- c) When you have been approved by this office the school or college will send copies of the approval document to you and to the Consulate for consideration in issuing the visa.
- d) For teaching and studying at a government school or university you must receive approval from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of University Affairs, or the university's administration.
- e) When you are approved, the school or college will send copies of the approval document to you and to the Consulate for consideration in issuing the visa.

### **Family Visit - Type O**

*To Visit As A Spouse Of A Thai Nationality.*

#### **Required documents**

1. Your passport - it must be valid for at least 6 months and contain at least one completely empty visa page.
2. One copy of the passport picture page
3. One application form - available from the consulate or downloaded from the Thai Consulate website: [www.Thai-la.net](http://www.Thai-la.net)
4. Two photos — 2" x 2", color, front-view, taken within 6 months. Write your name on the back.

5. A copy of a valid marriage certificate.
6. A copy of Thai passport or I.D card of the spouse.
7. A letter from the spouse verifying that the applicant and the spouse are still married and the purpose to visit Thailand.
8. To visit as an immediate family member of a Thai nationality
9. Supporting documents that serve to prove the identity and relationship with the applicant.

## **Research Visa – Type RS**

*For The Purpose Of Research*

### **Required documents**

1. Your passport – it must be valid for at least 6 months and contain at least one completely empty visa page.
2. One copy of the passport picture page
3. One application form – available from the Thai Consulate website.
4. Two photos — 2” x 2”, color, front-view, taken within 6 months. Write your name on the back .
5. An original letter of invitation from the accredited institution concerned

## **Media Visa – Type M**

*For The Purpose Of Working As A Film Producer, Journalist, or Reporter .*

### **Required documents**

1. Your passport – it must be valid for at least 6 months and contain at least one completely empty visa page.
2. One copy of the passport picture page



3. One application form - available from the consulate or downloaded from the Thai Consulate website: [www.Thai-la.net](http://www.Thai-la.net)
4. Two photos — 2" x 2", color, front-view, taken within 6 months. Write your name on the back.
5. To visit as a journalist
  - a) An official note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs certifying the purpose of travel.
6. To visit as a film-producer
  - a) An official note from the FILM BOARD certifying the purpose of travel.

## **Retirement Visa -- Type OA**

### **Qualifications for an applicant**

1. A foreign national who is at least 50 years old.
2. Not being prohibited from entering the Kingdom under the Immigration Act. B.E. 2522.
3. Having the nationality of or the residence in the country where his/ her application is submitted.
4. Having no criminal record against the security of Thailand and the country of his/her nationality, or the country of his/her residence.
5. Not having prohibitive diseases as indicated in the Ministerial Regulation No.14 (B.E. 2535).
  - a) Leprosy, tuberculosis, elephantiasis, drug addiction, alcoholism, 3rd stage of syphilis.

### **Required documents**

*One original and three copies.*

*Document 5 - 7 must be notarized*

- 1 Four (4) application forms. These can be downloaded from the Thai Consulate website [www.Thai-la.net](http://www.Thai-la.net)
- 2 Four (4) photos — Passport-type photo, 2" x 2", color, front-view, taken within 6 months, and write your name and last name on the back of each photo.
- 3 The original passport and four (4) copies of the passport picture page. The passport must be valid for at least 18 months.
- 4 Four (4) copies of Personal Data Form. This can be downloaded from the Thai Consulate website [www.Thai-la.net](http://www.Thai-la.net)
- 5 Four (4) copies of your bank statement showing a deposit of not less than 800,000 baht
  - a) or an income certificate with a monthly salary of no less than 65,000 baht
  - b) or a deposit account plus a monthly income of no less than 800,000 baht a year. In the case of the bank statement, a letter of guarantee from the bank is to be presented.
- 6 Four (4) copies of police verification stating the applicant has no criminal record issued by the authority concerned of his/her nationality or residence (the verification must be valid not more than 3 months).
- 7 Four (4) copies of a medical certificate issued from the country where the application is submitted, showing no prohibitive diseases as indicated in the Ministerial Regulation No. 14 (B.E. 2535) with the name and address of the doctor. The certificate validity is three months (3 months).

### **Spouse Requirements**

The marriage certificate must be presented as an evidence, in the case that the applicant

wishes to have his/ her spouse stay together in the Kingdom but his /her spouse is not qualified for the retirement visa.

(The spouse will be considered for the Non-immigrant Visa Type “O” or Temporary Residents)

### **Recommendations for the Alien while staying in the Kingdom.**

1. Every 90 days, the alien must report to the Immigration office or the police station in the alien’s residence area.
  - a) In order to report by mail, the alien must submit the following documents seven days before the due date, by acknowledgement of receipt mail to the Immigration Bureau, Sathorn Tai Road, Bangkok 10120.
  - b) The Report Form (TM 47).
  - c) A copy of the passport pages showing the alien’s photo, personal detail, and the latest arrival visa stamp.
  - d) A self addressed stamped envelope.
  - e) In the case of conducting any following reports, the Reply Form for the previous report must be enclosed.
2. At the end of the one-year stay, the alien who wishes to extend his/her stay must submit a request to the Immigration Bureau with the documented evidence of money transfer /or a deposit account in the Kingdom /or an income certificate at the amount of no less than 800,000 baht / or an income certificate plus a deposit account at the total amount of no less than 800,000 baht a year.

3. The marriage certificate must be presented, if the alien's spouse wishes to extend his/her stay.

### ***Visa and Immigration Assistance Agencies***

Here are two agencies where you can obtain accurate visa information and bona fide legal services.

#### **Sunbelt Legal Advisors**

Sunbelt Asia Co., Ltd  
Fortune Town 26 Flr.  
1 Ratchada Phisek Rd.  
Bangkok, Thailand  
Tel: 02 642 0213-18  
E-mail: [legal@sunbeltasia.com](mailto:legal@sunbeltasia.com)  
Website: [www.lawyer.th.com](http://www.lawyer.th.com)

This company is very helpful and will offer assistance and advice for phone and E-mail inquiries from abroad.

#### **Siam International Legal Group**

45 Sukhumvit Rd. Soi 24  
Klongtoey, Bangkok 10110  
Skytrain Station: Phrom Phong Exit 4  
Tel: 02 661 1362  
E-mail: [info@siam-legal.com](mailto:info@siam-legal.com)  
Website: [www.siam-legal.com](http://www.siam-legal.com)

### ***Visa Extensions***

The Tourist Visa and the Non-immigrant Visa can be extended for 30 days while in the kingdom by applying, before the visa expires, to the Thai Immigration Bureau in Bangkok. The process is explained in English on posters and the forms are printed in English. It takes about one hour and the fee is 2000 baht for a one-month extension. You will need one passport size photograph and photo copies of inside personal information, Departure Card and current visa.

## ***Visa Overstay***

Unless it is absolutely unavoidable, do not overstay your visa. If you remain in the country after your visa has expired you could be taken directly to jail. At the very least, you will be fined for each day that you have overstayed and the violation noted in your passport. I have seen people at the Thai Consulate in Penang, Malaysia who were denied a visa because they had overstayed once too often. One man ranted at the Consulate officers, “I’ve got to get back to Bangkok! Everything I own is there and my wife is running the beer bar, alone!” In most cases you will still be able to re-enter Thailand with a 30 day on-arrival visa issued when you arrive in the country, unless you are declared *persona non grata* and are barred from the kingdom.

If you overstay only a few days you can usually pay the fine at the airport or border checkpoint. But if you are stopped by the police for any reason and found without a visa you will get a ride on a motorcycle with your hands cuffed behind your back, sandwiched between two cops. Then you will be detained in the infamous Immigration Detention Center until you can pay the fine and book passage out of the country. The fine is 500 baht per day, and this will include the time spent in detention, to a maximum of 20,000 baht.

## ***Visa Re-Entry Permit***

If you are in Thailand on a Retirement Visa and you want to leave the country for awhile and then return, you must inform the Immigration Department of your plan and request a Re-Entry Permit. If you leave the country without doing this, your current visa becomes invalid and you will need to apply for the Retirement Visa all over again. Any time you leave Thailand your current visa is terminated and you must enter the kingdom on a new visa unless you obtain a Re-Entry Permit that allows you to re-enter on your current visa.

### **To obtain a Re-Entry Permit you will need:**

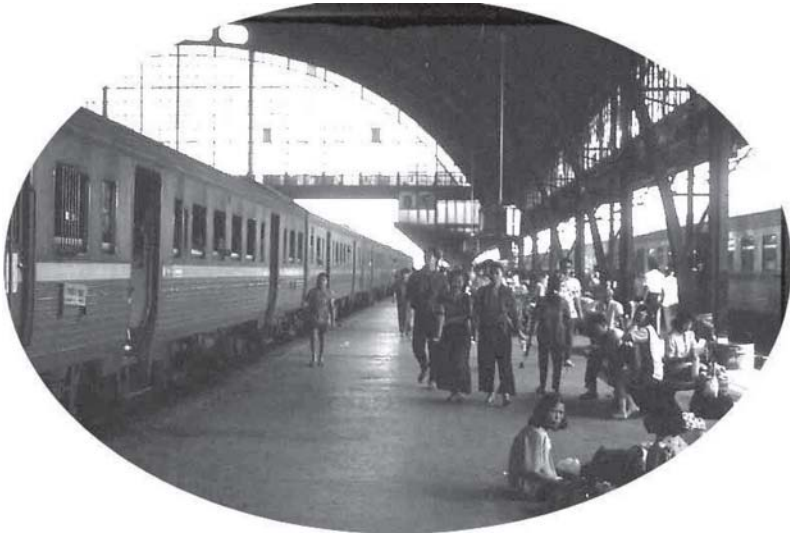
- √ Airline boarding pass (when departing by air)
- √ Two, color photos, passport size
- √ Two copies of your passport title page with your photo and personal data
- √ Two copies of your passport visa page
- √ Two copies of the Immigration Departure TM card that was given to you when you arrived
- √ 500 baht fee for a single re-entry, 1000 baht for multiple re-entry

### **Where to Apply**

You can obtain a re-entry permit at the International Airport on the day of departure from Thailand.

- √ First you check in at the airline counter and obtain a boarding pass.
- √ Next you go to the Re-Entry Permit counter before you go through the Immigration Control counter. It is located on the 3rd floor of the Departure Hall, International Passenger Terminal. Allow one hour for the process.

If you are traveling by land you must apply in person at the Immigration Bureau in Bangkok. The Re-entry Permit window is located on the ground floor. Apply in the morning and it will be completed in the afternoon. You will need to present your train or bus ticket to verify your transportation out of the country.



## *Visa Runs*

When your visa expires, you will need to leave the country and obtain a new one at a Thai Consulate in a neighboring country. Some expatriates dread this exercise and many scams have been created to obtain visas without leaving Thailand.

One recent operation involved giving your passport and visa fee, plus a commission, to an expatriate who took it overseas and presented it to the Thai Consulate for a new visa. You were not given a receipt for the passport and if anything went wrong you could find yourself in a lot of trouble. In today's world, juggling data and smuggling passports is risky business. Keep your passport in order, play by the rules of the Thai Immigration Department and you will have no trouble renewing your visa. You may feel that making a trip out of the country a few times a year is bothersome, but I like the visa-runs. They give me a reason to travel and visit other parts of the kingdom as well as the neighboring countries.

The regulations and policies for long-term residency in Thailand are altered without notice and it is best to visit the Thai Consulate website and one of the visa advisory companies listed in this chapter before you apply for a visa.

## ***SE Asian Embassies***

The costs and regulations for obtaining visas into neighboring countries can be changed without notice; check with the embassy of the country before you leave Bangkok. Below is a listing of those most commonly used for visa runs.

### **Malaysian Embassy**

33-35 South Sathorn Rd.  
Sathorn, Bangkok 10120  
Tel.: 02 679 2190  
Fax: 02 679 2208  
<http://asiatravel.com/malinfo.html>

### **Cambodian Embassy in Bangkok**

No. 185 Rajadamri Rd.  
Lumpini Patumwan,  
Bangkok, Thailand 10330  
Tel.: 02 254 6630  
Fax: 02 253 9859  
E-mail: [recbkk@hotmail.com](mailto:recbkk@hotmail.com)  
Website: [www.embassy.org/cambodia](http://www.embassy.org/cambodia)

### **Embassy of Laos in Thailand**

520,502/1-3, Soi Sahakarnpramoon  
Pracha Uthit Rd.  
Wangthonglang, Bangkok 10310  
Tel.: 02 539 6667  
Fax: 02 539 3827  
E-mail: [sabaidee@bkklaembassy.com](mailto:sabaidee@bkklaembassy.com)



## ***Departure Notes***

- √ The Thailand, Departure Card (TM card) must be submitted when you leave the kingdom.
- √ Take four (4), color photos 2"x 2" for visa applications.
- √ If you have overstayed your visa, be prepared to pay 200 baht for each day over.
- √ There is a 500 baht departure tax at the airport.

## ***Visa Turnaround***

If you entered the kingdom with a multiple entry visa you do not need to go to the Consulate when the first visa expires. You have only to cross the border into Malaysia, Laos, or Cambodia. At the Immigration control checkpoint you are cleared out of Thailand and into the neighboring country. Then you can simply turn around and re-enter Thailand on your second visa.

When you need to renew a tourist or non-immigrant visa you must apply at a Thai consulate outside of Thailand. The Thai Immigration offices at the border can issue only a 30-day, On Arrival Visa when you re-enter the kingdom. Many expatriates are making trips to the border once a month to obtain the 30-day visa. This is perfectly legal but a series of back-to-back 30-day visas may raise bureaucratic eyebrows, invite probing questions, and require proof of funds to live on. Whenever possible, obtain a Tourist or Non-Immigrant visa from a consulate.

### ***Poi Pet, Cambodia***

From Bangkok, Poi Pet is the nearest and the visa turn-around can be completed in one day by motor coach. There are several tour companies in Bangkok that specialize in this service. Here is one that has a good reputation with the expatriate community.

## **Jack's Golf**

212/18 Sukhumvit Plaza, 3rd Flr.  
Soi 12 Sukhumvit Rd.  
Bangkok, 10110  
Tel.: 02 251 1946  
E-mail: jack@jackgolf.com  
Website: www.jackgolf.com

Cost is 2,000 baht and includes transportation, Cambodia visa fee, and a buffet lunch at the Casino.

Book at least two days in advance. Bring your passport and one passport photo for the Cambodian visa.

Coaches depart at 5:30 and 7am in front of the 7-11 store located at Sukhumvit Soi 12, and return to Bangkok at 3:30 and 5pm.

## ***Padang Besar, Malaysia***

This border run can be made by train as well as motor coach. Travel from Bangkok takes one day.

The first leg of this trip is to the southern Thai city of Had Yai. Both trains and motor coaches make the trip overnight. From there you will need to take a local bus or shared taxi for the trip to the border. In Had Yai, there are numerous ticketing agents that provide the bus and taxi services.

At the border, you get checked out of Thailand and checked into Malaysia. Then you turn around, check out of Malaysia and back into Thailand. Finally, retrace your steps back to Had Yai and Bangkok.

## ***Burma, Laos, and Cambodia***

There are a few road and river crossings into Burma, Laos, and Cambodia where you can get

checked out of Thailand and into the neighboring country but you may be required to have a visa for the country or buy one at the border at a higher than usual price.

## ***The Visa Run***

Obtaining a visa from a Thai Consulate in a neighboring country takes 4-5 days, including one day of travel each way and two days for the visa process.

Make sure that the Consulate will be open when you plan your run since the offices are closed on weekends and Thai holidays as well as the holidays of the country you are visiting. The nearest Thai consulate is located in Georgetown on Penang Island, Malaysia. Consulates are also located in Vientiane, Laos and Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

The policies of Thai Consulates vary somewhat. Some are more relaxed in the interpretation of the rules. Keep informed by talking to other expatriates and checking the Internet news groups [www.thaivisa.com](http://www.thaivisa.com).

### ***Georgetown, Penang Island, Malaysia***

Royal Thai Consulate-General  
1 Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman  
10350 Penang, Malaysia  
Tel.: (604) 226 8029, 226 9484  
Fax: (604) 226 3121  
E-mail : [thaipg@tm.net.my](mailto:thaipg@tm.net.my)

Located on Penang Island, one mile off the west coast of Malaysia, this consulate is convenient to Bangkok and the visa-run may be made by air, motor coach, or train. It is open Monday through Friday from 9am to noon for visa applications and from 2 to 4pm for passport return. The visa fees are accepted in Malaysian currency only.

## ***Transportation***

### **By Air**

When you go by air you will be granted a three-month visa for Malaysia upon arrival at Penang Airport. From there you will need to take a taxi to the city of Georgetown. If you arrive in the morning you can go directly to the Thai Consulate and submit your visa application. You will be able to claim your passport the next day. This will leave you with enough time to catch a return flight to Bangkok.

### **By Motor Coach**

These air conditioned highway cruisers have a rest room, reclining seats, and a stewardess serving snacks and soft drinks. Booking is made through travel agencies and there are frequent trips scheduled.

The visa run by coach begins with an overnight trip from Bangkok to the southern Thai city of Had Yai. There you transfer to a Malaysian bus for the journey to the bus/train terminal at Butterworth, Malaysia. From there you take the ferry to the island of Penang.

### **By Train**

Train travel is a little slower than motor coach, and the fare is usually a little higher, but it is the safest and most comfortable way to go. The security in the train is very good, theft is not a problem and a steward is assigned to each car .

### **Train Tickets**

You can purchase tickets from the Advanced Booking Window at the Hualumphong Station in Bangkok or at the travel agency listed below.

## **Hat Siam Travel**

866 Ploenchit Rd. at Wireless Rd. intersection  
Located near the intersection of Ploenchit and  
Wireless (Wittayu) roads at the Ploenchit  
Skytrain station.

Tel.: 02 255 5420

E-mail: hatsiamThailand@hotmail.com

Reservations for a berth on the International  
Express should be made well in advance and it



is advisable to  
book your  
return trip  
reservations at  
the same time.  
Check these  
websites for  
more details.

### **Thai Train and Rail**

[www.thaifocus.com/travel/train](http://www.thaifocus.com/travel/train)

### **Travel by Train in Thailand**

[www.seat61.com/Thailand.htm](http://www.seat61.com/Thailand.htm)

### **Return Reservations**

This is a popular train and the second-class  
seats and berths from Malaysia to Bangkok are  
often booked up a week  
in advance so you should  
book your return  
passage in Bangkok to  
return on a specified  
date.



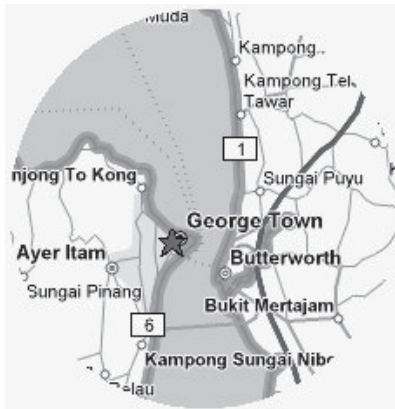
### ***Travel Details***

The International  
Express is fully air  
conditioned and has  
first-class compartments

as well as second-class berth and seating coaches. There is also a dining car where reasonably priced, freshly-cooked meals are cooked to be served at your seat.

The fare between Butterworth and Bangkok is 1000 baht one-way, for a second-class berth.

The train departs Bangkok daily at 2:45pm and then arrives at the border station of Padang Besar the next morning.



At the border station you will leave the train while you check out of Thailand. You need your passport and Departure Card as well as any luggage

you are traveling with.

Next you fill out the Malaysian visa application and present it with your passport to the Malaysian Immigration officer who will grant you a three-month visa. Finally, Malaysian Customs will inspect your baggage.

The train departs at 10:30am, Malaysia time (one hour ahead of Thailand time), so you will have time for breakfast at the food kiosk on the second floor of the building. There is also a Currency Exchange counter on the first floor. The rate of exchange is usually 9-10 baht to one Malay Ringget (MR).

The train arrives at the Butterworth Terminal that is also the terminal for international motor coaches, as well as the ferry to Penang Island. Here, you take the boat to Georgetown.

## *Landing In Georgetown*



### **Accommodations**

There are scores of hotels in Georgetown ranging in quality from guesthouse rooms to, the venerable Eastern & Oriental Hotel.

Budget hotels and guest houses are located on Chulia Street, a five minute walk from the ferry terminal. Taxi fare is about MR\$6 to the intersection of Chulia Street and Penang Road.



Room rates are around MR\$30 (300 Thai baht). Listed below are two that are favorites with travelers.

### **Stardust Guest House**

370-D Chulia St.  
Penang, 10200 Malaysia

This guesthouse is highly recommended by travelers for the friendly staff, tasty, inexpensive meals and security. The coffee is excellent.

### **Island City Hotel**

456 Chulia St.  
Penang, 10200 Malaysia

This guesthouse is located near the intersection of Chulia Street and Penang Road.

There are several mid-range hotels located on Penang Road. Listed here are two to get you started.

**Hotel Malaysia**

7 Penang Rd.  
10000 Penang, Malaysia.  
P.O. Box 11  
Tel.: (604) 263 3311  
E-mail: hotelmal@tm.net.my  
Website: www.hotelmalaysia.com.my  
Room rates from RM\$80-90 (800-900 baht)  
Includes buffet breakfast. Check website for special prices.

**Hotel Continental Penang**

5 Penang Rd.  
10000 Penang, Malaysia  
Tel.: 04 263 6388  
E-mail form available on Website:  
www.penang-hotels.com/hotelcontinental

This hotel is located next to the Malaysia Hotel.  
Room rates from RM\$80-90 (800-900 baht).  
Includes buffet breakfast.

For more information about Penang hotels:  
www.penang-hotels.com

**Mariners Centre Penang**

1A, Light Street, 10200 Penang  
Tel.: (604) 617473

**Internet Cafes in Georgetown**

There are two Internet cafes on Chulia Street near Love Lane. Rate is RM\$1 per 20 min.

**Visa Application at The Consulate**

The round-trip taxi fare from Georgetown to the Thai Consulate is RM\$20 and the taxi will wait for you.

Many hotels offer courier service to take your passport to the consulate and pick it up the



next day, but this is advisable only for the Tourist Visa. For Non-Immigrant applications it is best to go in person.

### **The Time Required and Travel Options**

Whether you travel by train or motor coach the Visa Run to Penang requires five days. For example:

Day 1 — You depart Bangkok on Sunday afternoon and arrive at Penang on Monday afternoon.

Day 2 — Tuesday morning, between 9am and noon, you submit the visa application.

Day 3 — Wednesday afternoon, between 2 and 4pm, you pick up your passport from the consulate.

Day 4 — Thursday at 2pm. you board the train at Butterworth Terminal for Bangkok.

Day 5 — Friday you arrive in Bangkok at 1pm.

Although you might be able to cut some corners and save some time, this is the usual timetable for the visa run, but remember that the consulate is closed for Thai or Malaysian holidays. Check the holiday calendar before you go. In addition, include ample time to make your travel connections since there is always the possibility for cancellations, or unannounced schedule changes.

On a recent trip I made, a freight train had derailed on the Malaysian side of the border and blocked the tracks, causing the cancellation of the International Express train from Butterworth. I had to find a way to get to Had Yai where I could catch the train to Bangkok.

Fortunately, there are three alternate ways to travel to Had Yai.

## ***From Georgetown***

### **Minibus Service**

These are cramped vehicles with inexperienced drivers. The fare is RM\$25. They are booked in advance through hotels or travel agents.

## ***From the Butterworth ferry terminal***

The shared taxi and international motor coach transportation stations are next to the train terminal.

### **Shared Taxi**

The taxi takes three people for a fare of RM\$25 per person. They do not have a schedule but depart when they have three passengers. They are older, larger cars with generally faulty air-conditioning, so although the time on the road may be less than that of the motor coach, the comfort zone is also less.

### **International Motor Coach**

These motor coaches are the safest and most comfortable transportation method. The seats are wide and leg room is ample. The fare is RM\$25 and the trip takes about four hours. The coach leaves at 2:30pm, Malaysia time, and arrives in Had Yai in time for the 6:30pm train to Bangkok.

## ***Consulates in Cambodia and Laos***

### **Phnom Penh, Cambodia**

#### **Royal Thai Embassy**

4 Boulevard Monivong  
Sangkat Sras Chork

Khan Daun Pehn, Phnom Pehn  
Tel.: (85523) 426 182  
Fax: (85523) 810 860

### **To get there**

This visa-run can be made by bus from the Thai border or by air from Bangkok. Air travelers must get a visa in Bangkok before departure. There is a US\$25 arrival and departure fee that is paid at the Phnom Pehn airport. Overland travelers can get a visa at the border. The visa cost is around US\$40. Include two passport photos with visa applications. Visit the Cambodian Consulate in Bangkok for latest regulations and costs.

## ***Vientiane, Laos***

### **Royal Thai Embassy**

Consular Section  
The Regent Centre  
Route Luangprabang  
Tel.: (856-21) 217 157  
Fax: (856-21) 216 998

This visa-run may be made by bus, train, or air. A visa for Laos can be obtained from the Laotian Consulate in Bangkok or at the border crossing in Nong Khai. Include two passport photos for the visa.

### **To get there**

Take the train from Hualamphong Station to Nong Khai. A sleeper car is advisable for the overnight journey to the Thai border on the Mekong River. There you depart from Thailand and cross the Friendship Bridge into Laos. The trip to Vientiane by tuk-tuk costs 100 to 150 baht. The Thai visa process takes two days.





## *Arriving in Bangkok*

The Don Muang - or Suvarnabhumi International - Airport is one of the softest landing spots in Asia for Immigration and Customs formalities. In addition, the terminal is not complicated and provides several transportation links to the city.

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### ***Immigration Control***

The first stop you make upon arrival is the Immigration Counter where your visa is stamped and a Departure Card (TM card) is given to you. Do not lose this card since you will need it to leave the kingdom. Staple it to a page in your passport.

### ***Customs Inspection***

Next, you collect your baggage and go to the Customs Inspection station. What happens here varies for although the Customs Regulations are clearly written, interpretation and

enforcement are ultimately in the control of the inspector at the gate. Over the years I have made numerous trips into the kingdom and I have never had my baggage inspected. This includes times when I arrived with several carts loaded with suitcases and cartons. In addition, none of my expatriate friends have ever been through a baggage check. That's not to say that it doesn't happen.

After clearing Customs you enter a large arrival hall lined with hotel accommodation desks, transportation service counters, and money exchange windows.

### ***Currency Exchange***

Change some dollars into baht at one of the bank counters. They all offer the same authorized rate of exchange. Be sure to obtain several bills of 20, 50 and 100 baht denominations.

## ***Transportation To The City***

There are several modes of transportation to the city. You can hire a private car for 650 baht from one of the transportation desks, or you can hire a "Taxi Meter" at the rank outside of the building. The fare will be between 200-300 baht. The least expensive transport is the airport bus service for 100 baht.

### ***Airport Bus Service***

The Airport Buses are only for passengers traveling between the Don Muang Airport and the city and do not stop for inner-city passengers. They run about every 15 minutes from 4:30am until 12:30am. The service from the airport costs 100 baht and provides four routes into the city that stop at popular tourist hotels and destinations. The bus terminal at the airport is located on the lower level of the terminal building. Ask airport personnel for directions. Listed below

are descriptions of the routes and the hotels located along the way. When you board the bus, tell the conductor where you want to get off.

## ***Sukhumvit Road***

The area of Sukhumvit Road is a good place for newcomers to set up a base at least for a few days. The Road begins near the intersection of Ploenchit and Wireless Roads and is the longest highway in the kingdom stretching to the Cambodian border. But when expatriates refer to Sukhumvit Road they usually mean the area between Soi 1 where the road begins, and Sol 63.

Sois are side streets that branch off the main road and are numbered with the odd numbers on the north side of the street and the even numbers on the south side. The sois are named for the main road that they branch off from. For example, Soi 8 Sukhumvit means that the soi branches off Sukhumvit Road. Some of the addresses have a “/”, which indicates a sub-address or soi. For example, 123/1 Soi 8/1 means that the address is a part of “123” and the soi is a sub-soi of Soi 8.

This area has a relatively large expatriate community and many hotels, restaurants, hospitals, department stores, book shops, shoe makers, tailors, night spots, banks and currency exchange booths have been established to serve them so it is not difficult to find someone who speaks English. The Skytrain and city buses run along the street and a subway line intersects it providing transportation to most of the locations in Bangkok. In addition, taxis, tuk-tuks and motorcycle taxis are plentiful. See the chapter Getting Around for details.

## ***Hotels***

Many of the hotels maintain websites where you can book a room at better rates than you will get through a travel agent. If you are on a tight budget you may want to pre-book a room online and shop for less expensive accommodations after you arrive. For a listing of Bangkok hotels visit the website, [www.hotelthailand.com](http://www.hotelthailand.com)

Between Soi 1 and Soi 20 there are two dozen hotels within a short distance of each other. Rates start at US\$15 a night including swimming pool and air conditioner.

### **Nana Hotel US\$47 -100**

2 Soi 4, Sukhumvit Rd.

Tel.: 02 656 8111

E-mail: [nanabkk@nanahotel.co.th](mailto:nanabkk@nanahotel.co.th)

Website: [www.nanahotel.co.th](http://www.nanahotel.co.th)

### **Stable Lodge US\$25**

39 Soi 8, Sukhumvit Rd.

Tel.: 02 653 0017

E-mail: [hotel@stablelodge.com](mailto:hotel@stablelodge.com)

Website: [www.stablelodge.com](http://www.stablelodge.com)

### **Premier Travelodge**

170 Soi 8, Sukhumvit Rd.

Tel.: 02 251 3031

### **President Inn**

155/14 Soi 11/1, Sukhumvit Rd.

Tel.: 02 255 4250

E-mail: [presidentinn@cvloo.com](mailto:presidentinn@cvloo.com)

### **Comfort Inn US\$15**

15 3/11 Soi 11/1, Sukhumvit Rd.

Tel.: 02 251 9250

E-mail: [comfort@ksc.th.com](mailto:comfort@ksc.th.com)



**Business Inn US\$18**

155/4 5 Soi 11/1, Sukhumvit Rd.  
Tel.: 02 254 7981

**Ruamchit Travelodge US\$20**

11/1 Soi 11, Sukhumvit Rd.  
Tel.: 02 653 1318  
E-mail: rcbangkok@hotmail.com

**Federal Hotel US\$25**

27. Soi 11, Sukhumvit Rd.  
Tel.: 02 253 5332  
E-mail: federalhotel@hotmail.com

**Miami Hotel US\$15**

2 Soi 13, Sukhumvit Rd.  
Tel.: 02 253 0369

**Premier Inn US\$20**

9/1 Soi 20, Sukhumvit Rd.  
Tel.: 02 643 1191  
E-mail: bangkok@hotelthailand.com

**Honey Hotel US\$20**

31 Soi 19, Sukhumvit Rd.  
Tel. 02 253 0646  
E-mail: honeyho@ksc.th.com

## ***Food Costs***

Bangkok is truly an international city and this fact is shown clearly by its incredible variety of restaurants. English, German, Danish, Scandinavian, Italian, Middle Eastern, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Muslim, and even the American fast food chains are all here and you can get a full meal for US\$5-6. If you stay with Thai food your cost could be as low as US\$5 a day. Thai restaurants are very reasonable.

Even less expensive are the food carts that set up on the sois. These mobile kitchens serve fried rice dishes and noodle soups. Despite their appearance, they are generally hygienic since the food is cooked at a high temperature and it is rare that it will cause illness. The meals are less than US\$1.

### ***Average Meal Costs***

Plate of Thai food, over rice (lard khao) at a small restaurant US\$1-1.75

Plate of Western style food in an expatriate-restaurant US\$3.75-7.50

Meal for 2 at a high quality Thai restaurant US\$4.50-11.00

Grilled chicken and sticky rice from a street vendor US\$.50

You will find several restaurant guides at your hotel and in travel agencies.

#### **Thai meals**

Here is a list of Thai dishes that are popular with expatriates.

#### **Curry Dishes**

**Gang mat sa man** - A Southern Thai curry with beef and vegetables

**Gang ga ree** - A mild curry with chicken, beef or lamb, and potatoes, tomatoes, and onions

**Gang keow wan** - Classic Thai curry, green and slightly sweet, with chicken, beef, pork, or shrimp

### **Soups**

**Gang chued** - A mild, clear soup made of vegetables and chicken, shrimp, fish balls or pork

**Tom yam** - A spicy soup with chicken, fish or seafood

**Gang liang** - a spicy soup with vegetables

### **Egg dishes**

**Khai tom** - hard boiled eggs

**Khai luak** - soft boiled eggs

**Khai dao** - fried eggs

**Khai jiew sai moo** - omelette with chopped pork

**Khai pha lo** - hard boiled eggs in brown broth

### **Fried dishes**

**Khao Phad** - fried rice with pork, chicken, seafood

**Phad phak** - fried vegetables with pork, chicken, or seafood

**Phad priew wan** - sweet/sour fried vegetables with pork, chicken or seafood

**Phad nua nam man hoi** - fried beef with oyster sauce and spring onion

**Gai phad prik** - fried chicken and chile peppers

**Mee krob** - crisp noodles with meat, shrimp, vegetables

## ***Restaurants***

You can get restaurant guide books from hotels and travel agencies. There are dozens of international

and Thai restaurants and food courts in the Sukhumvit area. Here is a list of reputable establishments to get you started.

## *American*

### **Bourbon Street**

29/4-6 Soi 22, Sukhumvit Rd.  
Behind Washington Theatre

### **Larry's Dive**

8/3 Soi 22 Sukhumvit Rd.

### **Tony Roma's**

87 Sukhumvit Rd., corner of Soi 5

### **Neil's Tavern**

58/4 Soi Ruam Rudi

## *British*

### **Wit's Oyster Bar**

Ruam Rudi Village  
20110-11 Soi Ruam Rudi

## *French*

### **Le Banyan**

59 Soi 8, Sukhumvit Rd.

### **Le Bistrot**

Ruam Rudi Village  
20/17-19 Soi Ruam Rudi

## *German*

### **Heidelberg Restaurant**

21-21/1 Soi 4, Sukhumvit Rd.  
Two blocks from Nana Hotel

### **Bei Otto**

1 Soi 20 ,Sukhumvit Rd.

## **Paulaner Brahaus**

99/397 Soi 24, Sukhumvit Rd.

## ***Middle Eastern***

There are several middle-eastern restaurants on Soi 3/1, Sukhumvit Rd.

### **Dosa King**

265/1 Soi 19, Sukhumvit Rd.  
Strictly vegetarian

### **Maharajah's**

19/1 Soi 8, Sukhumvit Rd.

### **Moghul Room**

Soi 11, Sukhumvit Rd.

### **Rang Mahal**

214 Soi 12, Sukhumvit Rd.

## ***Thai***

### **Suda Restaurant**

6 6/1 Soi 14, Sukhumvit Rd.  
A very popular restaurant with the expat community

## ***Home Delivery***

Order meal delivery from reputable restaurants.  
[www.foodbyphonebkk.com](http://www.foodbyphonebkk.com)

## ***Average costs***

Some example costs are listed below. The rate of exchange at the time of printing was approximately US\$1=33 baht

### **Food and Drink**

Plate of Thai food, some rice and a soft drink at an average small restaurant 40 baht to 70 baht

Plate of western style food and a soft drink in tourist-orientated restaurant 150 baht - 300 baht

Meal for 2 at a high quality, Thai restaurant 300 baht to 500 baht

Mac Donald's Big Mac Meal - Small/Large 85 baht /92 baht

Grilled chicken and sticky rice from a street vendor 20 baht

Large (630ml) 'Singha' beer from a 7-11 store 50 baht

Small (330ml) 'Singha' beer in an average bar 60 baht to 150 baht

1 liter of bottled water from a store 7 baht to 12 baht

Small Mars Bar 27 baht

### **Accommodation**

Guesthouse room on Khao San Road (small, fan-cooled, shared cold-water bathroom) 150 baht

Typical 3 Star hotel room 800 baht to 1200 baht

Typical 5 Star hotel room 3000 baht

Luxury apartment (per month) 20000 baht

Central Bangkok apartment with good facilities (per month) 8000 baht to 20000 baht

Non-central cheap apartment with few facilities (per month) 2000 baht to 4000 baht

## **Travel**

Average taxi or tuk-tuk fare around central Bangkok 70 baht

Ordinary / aircon bus fare 8 baht - 25 baht

Average fare on the express boats and canal boats 5 to 10 baht

Chartering a longtail boat for one hour 1000 baht

Average Skytrain fare 25 baht

## **General**

Cinema ticket 80 baht to 120 baht

Copy of 'The Nation' or 'Bangkok Post' newspaper 25 baht

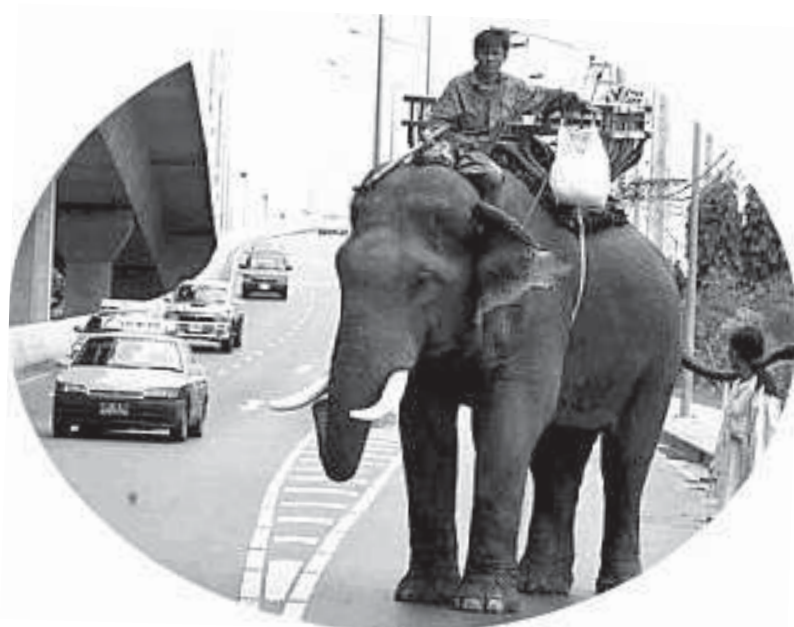
Haircut 160 baht

Barber and beauty shops are everywhere and a haircut include trimming of nose and ear hair, as well as neck and shoulders massage.

Beauty shops include a haircut, a few shampoos, a facial, neck and shoulders massage, manicures.







## *Getting Around The City*

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Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Bangkok's main transportation routes were canals (klongs) that laced the outlying rice fields and cut through the city to the river. Today, most of the klongs have been turned into streets and the country roads that connected the farms with the klongs have become sois.

The resulting maze of boulevards, avenues, sois, sub-sois, lanes and alleyways is incredibly chaotic to anyone used to cities laid out in a grid pattern. What's more, some major roads change names along their route and sois often include sharp turns along their way since they were established on private land unrestricted by city planning codes. Adding to the

confusion, the numbering system of the sois and house addresses differs considerably from western methods. You may know where you are in Bangkok, but the soi could lose its way.

English language transportation maps that show bus, Skytrain, Subway and river ferry routes are available in bookstores. Some tourist publications include maps that show more details and many businesses print a mini-map on business cards and brochures showing their location.

Another confusing factor for the newcomer is that English spelling of street names is not consistent. The official spelling is used on street signs but maps, business cards, brochures and other English language publications often use different spellings. For example, Soi Ekamai, or Aekamai are the same street spelled two different ways. But although the spelling has changed, the sound has not.

Then too, some roads change names along the way. For example, when you are heading west along Sukhumvit Road the name changes to Ploenchit Road near the Wireless Road intersection, then a half mile farther west at the Rajadamri Road intersection it becomes Rama 1 Road. New Petchburi Road heads west and changes its name to Petchburi Road then to Phitsanulok Road. Rachada Road heads north from Rama IV Road and changes its name to Soi Asoke, then to Rachada Pisek Road.

Street addresses quite often do not run in sequence since plots of land were given addresses when they were incorporated into the city. Several house numbers may run consecutively, say 5, 6, 7, and then the next sequence is numbered 1, 2, 3.

This confusion can be very frustrating unless you adopt an attitude of adventure and develop methods for comfortably exploring the city.

If you become lost don't be shy about asking for directions. You will eventually find someone who can help you. When you pronounce street names to Thais

put the accent on the last syllable. If that gets a puzzled look try again with the accent on the first syllable.

## *City Traveling Tips*

The Southeast Asian weather will be the most noticeable feature for newcomers from temperate climates. While those from small cities or towns might be intimidated by the pace of activity. Those from large cities will be amazed that so many people actually walk and use public transportation.

People who, when at home, would not walk two blocks to their destination may find themselves part of the pedestrian throngs. Walking is often faster than trying to figure out what bus to take and where to get off, or trying to give directions to a taxi driver.

- √ After showering, dust yourself liberally with St. Luke's Prickly Heat Powder. It really does help to keep you cool and comfortable. It is available in markets and pharmacies.
- √ Wear a pair of comfortable walking shoes, preferably a style that covers your foot. These will protect your feet from injury or infection.
- √ Wear clothing that will keep you clean, cool and protect you from sunburn and mosquitoes.
- √ Carry a shoulder bag, one with a wide strap is best. Wear it with the strap across your chest to keep it from sliding off and leave your hands free. When you are in a crowd or on a bus, keep it in front of you not on the side or in back.
- √ When you take taxis or busses, have the hotel clerk or apartment manager write your destination in Thai. Take a business card

from your hotel or apartment with the address in Thai.

- √ When you are settled in an apartment, have personal name and address cards printed in English on one side and in Thai on the other. Present your card when you meet with Thais in a formal or business situation.
- √ Carry a note book, a Robertson's English Thai dictionary, and a city transportation map.
- √ Note the bus numbers that pass by your hotel or apartment. These are the ones that will bring you back.
- √ Keep a stock of various coins and small denomination bills. Carry only the cash you will need for basic expenses in your pockets. Stow large amounts of cash or traveler's checks in your money belt.
- √ Use moist towelettes to refresh your face and hands. You can find them at convenience stores and pharmacies.
- √ During the day you can cool off in an air conditioned hotel lobby, restaurant, book store or coffee shop.
- √ Refresh with cold fruit juice, water, and electrolyte drinks.
- √ Always carry photocopies of the following passport pages:
  - Title page with your photo and personal data
  - Visa page with the latest entry stamp
  - Immigration TM (departure) card



# *Inner-City Transportation*

Bangkok has many types of transportation. The fares are low and there is always a way to get around at any time of day. The network includes overhead trains, subway trains, buses, taxis, motorcycle taxis, tuk-tuks, songtaos, and water taxis. It is not unusual to use several of these methods in one day.

## **Skytrain**

Until the year 2000 public transportation was a street level system often bogged down in traffic jams, then the Skytrain was added. This service operates on an elevated platform providing a view of the traffic jams on the street below. It is air conditioned, roomy and the glare proof windows give you a clear overview of the city. It is also the fastest way to travel. For example, from Sukhumvit Road to Chatuchak Weekend Market takes less than 10 minutes, by bus the trip takes around 30 minutes.

There are currently two lines in operation, the Sukhumvit Line and the Silom Line. The Sukhumvit Line runs from Mo Chit Station on Paholyothin Road (at Chatuchak Weekend Market) to On Nut Station at Sukhumvit Soi 77. The Silom Line runs between Saphan Taksin Station (Taksin Bridge, Chao Phraya River) and the National Stadium Station on Rama I Road. The two lines intersect at the Central Station (Siam Square) where there are two platform levels allowing a change of trains. Route maps are available at the stations.



All station platforms are monitored by security cameras and personnel. They are accessible by a stairway and up-escalators.

There are refreshment kiosks but no toilet facilities at the stations.

The trains run every three to five minutes, from 6am to midnight and tickets are available only at the stations. Single journey tickets are purchased from a machine that accepts five and ten baht coins and the fares begin at 10 baht, depending on the distance traveled.

Small change may be obtained at the ticket office and multi-trip tickets may be purchased for 200 baht plus a 30 baht deposit on the ticket. This ticket is returned by the automatic gate as you enter and the cost of each journey is deducted when you exit. The remainder of the ticket value is displayed at the exit gate. The ticket may be refilled at the ticket office.

### **Subway (MTA)**

The Bangkok subway system (known as the Metro) began operation in 2004 and has proven to be another effective link in the city's transportation network.

The air-conditioned platforms are accessible by escalators. Amenities include ATM machines, public telephone kiosks and ticket vending machines that accept notes or coins and return change.

The Metro intersects the Skytrain Sukhumvit line at the Soi Asoke station and the Mo Chit station.

Route maps are available at the stations and the personnel are very helpful. Visit the website for more details.

## ***Busses, Taxis, Tuk-tuks***

During off-peak hours Bangkok's city buses are an effective way to get around. Each bus has a conductor who collects fares, makes change and gives you a ticket. Keep this handy during the ride since

fare inspectors often board the bus and ask to see the passengers' tickets.

Most bus routes are serviced by both air conditioned and open-air buses. The fare is one price on the open-air buses but on the air conditioned ones you will need to tell the conductor where you want to go since the fare depends on the distance traveled.

Bus route maps are available from bookstores and while they are helpful they are not entirely accurate. Until you get the city wired, knowing when to get off the bus demands all of your attention. If you are seated you can look out the window and follow the progress on the bus map. But when you are standing it is not so easy since you cannot see the street signs or landmarks without bending over to look out the windows and there is often not enough room to bend over. If you get lost or pass up your destination, get off the bus and look for a bus going the other way with the same number that you arrived on. If you are on a one way road the return bus travels on a nearby road.

Buses don't always follow the routes that are shown on the bus map. The route number placards are colored blue, orange, or red. The blue colored placards follow the routes but the orange or red colored placards denote a shortened route or one that travels on the expressway. In addition, construction projects, high water or other obstructions could cause detours. Then comes the question: stay on, or get off? These are the decision points that provide some very interesting excursions in the city.



## Safety Tips

- √ At stops, buses don't always pull right next to the curb and passengers have to cross one lane of traffic. The conductor signals to the traffic that passengers are getting off or on but you must be very careful when boarding and getting off of a bus.
- √ Secure a hand hold as soon as you board. The driver will start off when everyone is on board.
- √ When standing, keep your knees bent a little. Sudden stops and starts are the norm and it is easy to lose your balance.
- √ There are pickpockets and bag slashers on the buses so carry your wallet in a front pocket and keep shoulder bags or hand bags in front of you.



## Non-Air Conditioned Buses

These open window buses are the least expensive. The blue/yellow (blue bus) is 5 baht and red/yellow (red bus) is 4 baht.

The destinations are written in Thai but the bus number is plainly visible on placards in the front windshield, on the side near the doors, and in the rear window. This number is shown on the bus map.

## Air Conditioned Buses

These busses are painted in a variety of colors. Some are blue and white, others are yellow and orange, and some are all white. The fares range



from 8 to 12 baht depending on the distance traveled and you will need to tell the conductor where you are going. This is best done by giving a soi number or the name of a hotel, temple, school, hospital or shopping center located near your destination.

## Taxis

Thousands of taxis prowl the city, day and night. They are identified by a rooftop sign, “Taxi



Meter,” that shows the Thai language syntax of adjective after the noun. Air conditioned Toyotas are the most common but new, roomy SUVs are being

added to the fleet.

- √ Taxis can be hailed anywhere. A red light on the dashboard indicates an unoccupied vehicle.
- √ Always carry an assortment of small bills and coins since the drivers may not have change.
- √ Before you get in, tell the driver where you are going so he can decide if he will take



you. Some drivers will refuse long distance fares or certain destinations during rush hours. In addition, drivers rent the taxis and they may refuse to take you if your destination is not convenient.



- ✓ The meter starts at 35 baht (about eighty cents US at the time of writing) and most inner city trips cost less than 100 baht.
- ✓ If you must take a taxi that has no meter, be certain of the fare before you get in.
- ✓ If the meter is not turned on or the driver says that it is broken, get out and take another taxi.
- ✓ Many taxi drivers are from the provinces and may not speak Thai very well, much less English.



- ✓ To order a taxi by phone, call 1661

## *Other Transport Modes*

While metered taxis are always found on the main roads and large sois they rarely cruise the small sois and lanes unless they are dropping off a fare, but the small sois are well served with transportation by siilors, tuk-tuks, and motorcycle taxis.

## **Siilors**

These small, covered pickup trucks with bench seats in the bed are also called Subarus, or songtaos. They operate on routes that connect the sois with main roads, bus stops, and marketplaces. The fares are around 10 baht. There are no set stops, just flag them down to board and ring the buzzer to get off. They wait for fares at the mouths of busy sois near major roads and at markets.

## **Tuk-tuks**

Every newcomer to Bangkok takes at least one ride on these open-air, three-wheelers. They are suitable for short trips in fair weather and are a good way to travel on the sois. The fares are always negotiated beforehand and they are only marginally cheaper than taxis.

## **Motorcycle Taxis**

Motorcycles have been referred to as Asia's answer to birth control. The driver will supply you with a helmet but it's really your knees that will concern you since the rider weaves through traffic at incredibly close distances. Women wearing skirts ride side-saddle - a delicate balancing act. Motorcycle taxis are found at the mouths of sois, parked along the



curb or on the sidewalk. They can be flagged down on the street. They wear day-glow vests with numbers on the back. The fares are 10 to 20 baht, depending on the distance. You can't get a ride like this at a theme park.



## ***Ferries and Water Taxis***

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Boats are the oldest form of transportation in Bangkok, going back to the time when the city was a maze of canals, and they are still in regular use.

Scheduled ferries cross the river and make several stops along the banks. They are used by school children and workers who regularly travel between Thonburi and Bangkok.

Boats that go into the Thonburi klongs are long and narrow with a four cylinder car



or truck engine mounted on a pedestal at the rear. A long propeller shaft leads from the engine into the water. These are called long tailed boats. They are quite fast and roar across the river raising a tall “rooster tail” of water. You will get an exciting ride but you must know where you want to get off and signal the driver when approaching your destination since they do not automatically stop at every landing.

Because of its scores of canals (klongs) Bangkok was known as the “Venice of The East”, and it still has an waterways that offer a great way of getting around. River express and canal boats are regularly used and are very inexpensive. One example is the 1 hour boat trip from the pier near the Oriental Hotel to Nonthaburi, a suburb in north Bangkok, for only 10 baht (US\$0.25).

The Klong Saen Saep canal spans Bangkok from the eastern suburbs to the Chao Phraya River and boats make the trip for 10 baht.

The river boats ply the large Chao Phraya river, stopping at the 20 main stops. They can be substantially quicker than the equivalent journey by road. For example, a trip from the Grand Palace to the Silom district could easily take over an hour by taxi, while the boat ride will only take around 15 or 20 minutes.

The boats are long, fast, and normally colored white with a red stripe. Fares vary between 5 and 10 baht according to the distance to your destination. They run every 20 minutes, from 5.30am until 6pm.

At each pier, there is a cross-river service (fare 1-2 baht), that depart frequently throughout the day. These are smaller boats normally waiting by the pier when you get there.

When boarding a River Express boat, don't hesitate as they only wait for a few seconds. Everyone scrambles to get on and off as quickly as possible. Tickets can either be bought on the boat or at the pier. Piers are marked in English.

### **Chao Phraya River Express Ferry**

This boat travels the river between the Krung Thep Bridge and Nonthaburi. The fares start at 6 baht. The service runs every day from 6am to 6pm. The Bangkok Bus Map shows the stops.

### **Cross River Ferries**

These boats operate between docks that are located near major bus lines on both sides of the river. The fare is two baht.

### **Long Tail Water Taxis**

These craft depart from the Chang Landing near the Grand Palace. They provide service to the Thonburi side of the river.

### **Saen Saep Ferry**

These boats run on Klong Saen Saep from the Bangkapi intersection in the eastern part of Bangkok to the Chao Phraya River. The fare is 5 to 7 baht.

## ***Telephone Services***

- √ Find out how many outside lines the switchboard has and the number of apartments.
- √ Check to see if the switchboard is automatic and if calls can be made to your room directly.
- √ Check the congestion level of the switchboard by calling the apartment at different times of the day.
- √ Some apartments disconnect the phone line after 15 minutes of use, others after only 5 minutes.
- √ Check the cost of making an international call and if you can make these calls directly from your room.
- √ New or upgraded apartments will have direct lines suitable for Internet connections, but older ones still use a switchboard. The charges for switchboard calls vary according to the rental agreement. In any case, they are likely to be very low, unless you make numerous overseas calls.
- √ Check the cost of a local call. Apartments with switchboards generally charge a rate of 5 baht for 15 minutes of usage.

## ***Laundry and Maid Services***

The apartment buildings have staff on hand to do laundry. Alternatively, you could take your clothes to a laundry and dry cleaning shop. Ask the apartment manager for the nearby location. Maid cleaning services are often included or can be added to the rent.

## ***Water Supply***

Apartments are billed monthly for city water services. Make sure you know the rate before

you move in. It's customary for the management to add a surcharge to the water bill. Some apartments charge less than others.

Use tap water only for bathing, laundry and dishes. It is not pure enough to drink or cook with.

Use only purified water for drinking and cooking. There are several water companies that deliver to your door at no extra charge.

Apartment managers often keep a stock of bottled water on hand or will arrange to have deliveries made to your apartment. Bottled water comes in different sizes: one liter bottles, 5 liter bottles and 5 gallon jugs.

The 5 gallon size is very economical and a stand-up water cooler can be rented that dispenses hot as well as cold water. I used this water for years and never had a problem with the purity.

### ***Water Companies***

These companies make deliveries of water in all sizes and rent water dispensers for the five gallon jugs.

#### **Boon Rawd (Singha Water)**

Tel.: 02 241 1361

#### **M Water Co. (Sprinkle Water)**

Tel.: 02 998 1350

#### **Mountain Spring**

Tel.: 02 913 2251







## **Villa Supermarkets**

Sukhumvit Road at the corner of Soi 33  
Ploenchit Center, Soi 2 Sukhumvit Rd.

This landmark store has been in business more than 25 years and stocks a wide range of imported and specialty food items. It also accepts phone orders and home delivery requests. The store at Sukhumvit Soi 33 is a favorite with the expatriate community and has a bulletin board for the expatriate community to use.

## **Foodland**

Soi Patpong 1, Silom Rd.  
Soi 5 Sukhumvit Rd.

“The Land of Food” as its motto states has a full range of products and very helpful staff. Open 24 hours.

## ***Bakeries***

Bangkok has a wide range of excellent bakeries. All the supermarkets have a bakery section or a bakery nearby. There are also small bakeries, combined with delicatessens or restaurants.

Major hotels such as The Oriental, The Regent, The Le Meridien, The President, and The Landmark have a baked goods section.

The Le Meridien Hotel, Sukhumvit Soi 2, sells bakery goods for half-price after 6pm. The Landmark Hotel Sukhumvit between Soi 4 and Soi 6, sells baked goods for half price after 7pm.



# *Money Management*

Thailand's rapid economic growth and its full integration with modern communications technology have moved its local and international banking procedures into the 21st Century. Gone are the days of long waiting periods for money transfers or trying to find a business that accepts international credit cards. Today, the banking system is safe, accurate, and efficient both locally and internationally.

## *Currency Exchange Rates*

The exchange rate between the baht and foreign currencies changes daily. Most of the time the changes are minor and for the past few years the rate has hovered between 30 and 33 baht to the US dollar.

Cash and Traveler's Checks can be exchanged at commercial banks. Many branches have currency exchange windows in front of the building, as well as currency exchange counters in tourist areas.

Major hotels are authorized to exchange foreign money but there may be a surcharge. On the plus side, they are open 24 hours a day.

## *Bank Services*

All banks, Thai and foreign, have their headquarters in Bangkok. From here, they are computer linked to their branches throughout the kingdom where personal banking services can be conducted. Many banks now have outlets in major department stores; these outlets are open for much longer hours and operate on weekends.

- √ Thai banks provide personal checking and savings accounts, as well as ATM, and computer banking services.

- √ Banks are open on weekdays from 8:30am to 3:30pm, except holidays.
- √ Currency exchange windows and kiosks operate longer hours and many are open from 8:30am to 10pm every day.
- √ Main branches of banks have clerks who speak English and the most common bank forms are printed in English as well as Thai.

### ***Savings Account***

Open a savings account with Bangkok Bank or Thai Farmers Bank. They are recognized internationally and maintain connections with many foreign banks, making international funds transactions much simpler and less expensive.

You can open a savings account in a Thai bank by presenting your passport with a valid visa and a minimum deposit. After an account has been approved, you can get an ATM card that can be used at machines located throughout the country. Upon further approval, a Premier ATM card can be obtained. This card extends the service to include the withdrawal of cash abroad using any overseas ATM within the PLUS system.

You can open an account in any bank branch but in order to make withdrawals from a different branch you may need to file a signature verification card with the branch or show your passport each time.

### ***Checking Account***

To open a checking account you must show proof of residency, and a work permit. Most expatriates don't use a checking account and

a lot of Thais don't either, preferring instead to pay wages and make purchases in cash.

An expatriate friend of mine once sold his house to a Thai-Chinese woman who paid him two million baht, in cash. "She showed up riding a bicycle," he told me, "and carrying a Central Department Store shopping bag full of Thai currency." In the US, this woman would have been suspected as a bank robber or drug dealer but in Thailand, it is business as usual.

### ***Bank Deposits***

Checks drawn on Thai banks and made to you can be deposited in your savings account. They are usually cleared within a couple of days but checks drawn on foreign bank accounts will take a few weeks to clear.

Be certain that you know the bank's policies on withdrawals before you deposit large amounts of foreign money into a Thai bank. Keep in mind that government banking regulations and rates of exchange are subject to change without notice.

Cash deposits in baht might be required for certain visas or to start a business. This deposit is refundable but the funds are subject to the fluctuations in value while they are held in Thailand.

### ***Thai and Foreign Banks***

Most of the major countries have established a branch of their national bank.

#### **Bangkok Bank (Head Office)**

333 Silom Rd.

Tel.: 02 231 4333

Fax: 02 231 4233

Website: [www.bbl.co.th](http://www.bbl.co.th)

This bank has scores of branches and ATM machines located throughout the kingdom. Many shopping malls have small branches with full banking services until 7pm. The English language website provides details of current policies and services. It also includes the branch locations in the city and provinces.

### **Bank of America**

All Seasons Place  
CRC Tower, 33rd Flr.  
87/2 Wireless Rd.  
Pathumwan, Bangkok 10330  
Tel.: 02 305 2800  
Fax: 02 305 2999  
Website: [www.bofa.com](http://www.bofa.com)

Only commercial accounts may be opened at this branch, but if you have a personal checking account in the US you can cash checks up to US\$250 a day, in US or Thai currency, from your account. The transaction is immediate and costs about 30 cents. You may also make money transfers between your savings and checking accounts.

### **Chase Manhattan Bank**

Bubhajit Bldg.  
20 Sathorn Nua (North) Rd.  
Tel.: 02 234 5992  
Fax: 02 234 8386

### ***Bank Listing Website***

Website: [www.geocities.com/WallStreet/2003/bank.html](http://www.geocities.com/WallStreet/2003/bank.html)  
Lists all foreign and local banks in Thailand

## *ATM Banking*

There are two ATM networks, Siam Net and Bank Net. Ask your bank for the details of their network and a list of the banks where your card can be used. A service charge will be made on inter bank withdrawals. Errors do occur so check your receipt each time you use the ATM. The machines are located at banks as well as some shopping centers.

ATM withdrawal limits vary from bank to bank. Be aware that some machines run out of cash, especially on weekends and holidays, or they may occasionally malfunction and keep your card. To avoid these problems you may wish to maintain two bank accounts in the same or a different bank, and carry two ATM cards.

## *Credit Cards*

Credit cards are widely accepted in Thailand but some businesses add a surcharge up to five percent for bills paid by credit card. To avoid this cost you may wish to apply for a baht credit card, one that pays in baht rather than US dollars.

Foreign credit card companies often use exchange rates that are not in their customers' best interest. By using a baht card you avoid the charges for the currency exchange services. American Express and Diners Club offer baht cards.

Another way to avoid extra charges when using you credit card is to get a cash advance on the card. Then change it into baht. Some branches of the Thai Farmers Bank allow cash advances up to US\$200 a day on Visa credit cards.

American Express card holders can obtain advances only as traveler's checks. The American Express representative office in Siam Center is easier to get to and can take care of most services.



## ***Lost Credit Cards***

Report lost credit cards to the nearest police station. Then, with a copy of the police report you can contact any of the following banks for a replacement card.

### **Thai Farmers' Bank**

400 Paholyothin Rd.  
Tel.: 02 270 1801

### **Thai Military Bank**

34 Phaya Thai Rd.  
Tel.: 02 246 0300

### **Bank of Ayudhya**

550 Ploenchit Rd.  
Tel.: 02 254 1830

### **Siam Commercial Bank**

1060 Petchburi Rd.  
Tel.: 02 256 1361

## ***American Express***

SP Building. (Main Office)  
388 Paholyothin Rd.  
Tel.: 02-273 5544  
After hours Tel.: 02 273 0022  
Hours Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm.  
Website: [www.americanexpress.com](http://www.americanexpress.com)

### **G.M. Tour & Travel Co.**

273 Khaosan Rd.  
Talad Yod, Phanakorn  
Bangkok , Thailand 10200  
Tel.: 02 282 3979

### **President Tour Co.**

412/8-9 Siam Square Soi 6  
Bangkok, Thailand 10330  
Tel.: 02 251 5111

## ***Diners Club***

Silom Bldg. 12th Flr.  
191 Silom Rd.,  
Tel.: 02 238 2920  
After hours Tel.: 02 238 2680  
Website: [www.dinersclub.com](http://www.dinersclub.com)  
General Customer Service  
In Thailand: 02 238 3660  
Out of Thailand 66 2 238 3660  
**Report Lost/Stolen Card** 02 238 3660

## ***Master Charge***

### **Bank of America**

All Seasons Place  
CRC Tower, 33rd Flr.  
87/2 Wireless Rd.  
Pathumwan, Bangkok 10330  
Tel.: 02 305 2800  
Fax: 02 305 2999  
Website: [www.bofa.com](http://www.bofa.com)  
US Office 001 800 11 887 0663 (toll-free number  
24 hours a day)  
For lost Master Charge card, call collect (314)  
275 6690, St. Louis, USA

## ***Visa***

Tel.: 02 256 7326 (24 hours) for lost or stolen  
cards.  
For lost card, report to Thai Farmers Bank. Tel.  
02 273 1199.

A cash advance is available from Thai Farmers  
Bank.

## ***Traveler's Checks***

Hotels, tourist shops, retailers, and travel agents  
will cash traveler's checks but their rate of exchange  
is lower than the bank's. The official rate of exchange  
is displayed at banks and currency exchanges and is

higher for traveler's checks than that for cash. You will need to show your passport when cashing traveler's checks.

### **American Express**

Phaya Thai Plaza  
Suite 88 92, 8th Flr.  
128 Phaya Thai Rd.  
Rajathivi, 10400  
Tel.: 02 216 5183

## ***Money Transfers***

Receiving money sent to you from abroad is rarely a problem in Thailand especially if you have a savings account at a major Thai bank. Then, funds sent to you electronically will be automatically deposited into your account and at a better rate of exchange than other methods.

Thai banks routinely use the SWIFT method (Society of Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) for electronic funds transfers and it has a reputation among the expatriates for fast, efficient, and lower cost services.

If you do not have a bank account, you can arrange to have a bank receive the money transfer and pay you in baht currency.

Thai banks usually process the SWIFT money transfer within two days of receipt and the money is available on the third day after it had been sent.

### **Useful Tips**

- √ Whenever possible, have money sent to the head office of the bank where you have an account. The transaction is quicker.
- √ Open an account in a major bank such as Bangkok Bank, or Thai Farmers since they are very familiar with funds transfer procedures.

- √ Have a fax of the remittance order sent to you. This is your proof that the money has been sent.

### ***SWIFT Transfer Options***

There are three designations for sending offshore funds to Thailand through the SWIFT method of transfer.

- √ BEN - The beneficiary pays for all the costs of the transaction. They are deducted from the amount of the funds sent.
- √ SHA - The sender and receiver share the costs. The sender pays the costs for sending and the recipient's bank deducts the fees from the amount being sent.
- √ OUR - The sender pays all the costs involved and the recipient gets the "net amount" of the funds sent.

### ***Western Union***

To send money through Western Union, visit the website for details. To collect the money the recipient must show his passport or ID card and the account number Western Union has provided the sender who has forwarded it to the recipient.

Website: [www.westernunion.com](http://www.westernunion.com)

### ***Money Exchange Control***

Visitors may bring in foreign bank notes or other types of foreign money. Upon leaving Thailand, visitors may take out the equivalent of the funds brought into Thailand. However, this amount is limited to US\$10,000 unless the visitor has declared a higher amount upon arrival. Though not legally required, forms to

declare the amount of foreign currency you are arriving with are available at the Immigration Department counter where you enter the country.

Attempts to take out of the country amounts in excess of US\$10,000 without having filed the arrival declaration form can lead to arrest, confiscation of the excess funds, and prosecution.

A brochure entitled, “Exchange Regulations in Thailand”, published by the Foreign Exchange Department of the Bank of Thailand, states, “there is no restriction on the amount of Thai currency that may be brought into the country. Foreign tourists are allowed to take out gold ornaments.”

## ***Personal Taxation***

Any foreigner, whether a resident or a non-resident, who earns money while living in Thailand must pay tax on income gained from business, salaries, or commissions.

A non-resident is taxed only on income from sources in Thailand.

A resident of Thailand is liable for taxes on income from sources in Thailand as well as on the portion of income from foreign sources that is brought into Thailand.

### ***Tax Consultants***

You may need the services of a tax consultant in order to determine your tax responsibility. There are numerous agencies that specialize in the preparation of the tax forms and policies. Below are two that will get you started.

## **Sunbelt Legal Advisors**

Sunbelt Asia Co., Ltd  
Fortune Town 26 Flr.  
1 Ratchada Phisek Rd.  
Tel: 02 642 0213-18  
E-mail: [legal@sunbeltasia.com](mailto:legal@sunbeltasia.com)  
Website: [www.lawyer.th.com](http://www.lawyer.th.com)

## **Siam International Legal Group**

45 Sukhumvit Rd., Soi 24  
Skytrain Station: , Phrom Phong Exit 4  
Tel: 02 661 1362  
*E-mail:* [info@siam-legal.com](mailto:info@siam-legal.com)  
Website: [www.siam-legal.com](http://www.siam-legal.com)



# *Communications, Media*

Thailand's double digit economic growth in the 1980s and early 1990s catapulted the communications sector into the modern age with efficient mail services, satellite telephone service, high-speed Internet connections and cable TV stations.

## *Mail Service*

The postal service has no problem delivering mail addressed in English when the address is typewritten or printed in capitalized, block letters. Clearly print or type the sender and receiver addresses when you send mail or packages, and instruct anyone who sends you mail to do the same.

Mail is delivered twice a day to your home or hotel but if you have no fixed residence you can receive mail at C/O GPO BANGKOK, THAILAND, POSTE RESTANTE and claim it at the General Post Office on Charoen Krung Road.

When you are sent parcels from overseas the postman will leave a notice at your home and you will need to claim them at the Post Office indicated on the notice. You will need to show your passport and may be required to pay import duty on certain items.

When you send parcels, do not seal them until the contents have been inspected at the Post Office. There is a parcel service at each post office that wraps and seals packages for a nominal cost. Parcel post shipping to the US by sea mail takes 2 months; budget air parcel post takes one month; and 7 to 10 days by air mail.



## ***Post Office Locations***

The Post Office is open from 8:30am to 4:30pm and there are numerous branches throughout the city each one serving a sub-district such as Klong Toey, or Phra Kanong. The sub-district is part of your address and is the branch where you report problems or receive packages. Ask your apartment manager for the post office nearest you.

### **Main General Post and Telegraph Office**

Located on Charoen Krung Road near the intersection of Surawong Road. Open 24 hours.

### **Sukhumvit Area Post Offices**

Soi 23 Sukhumvit, 1/2 block from Sukhumvit Rd.

Sukhumvit Road between Soi 36 and 38

Sukhumvit Road near the corner of Soi 4 (Nana)

Sukhumvit Road on 2nd floor of the Bangkok Bank building between Sois 8 and 10.

## ***Air Freight Services***

### **DHL International (Thailand) Pte Ltd.**

Grand Amarin Tower, 22nd Floor

1550 New Petchburi Road

Kwaeng Makasan, Khet Rachtavee

Bangkok 10320 Thailand

Tel.: 02 345 5000

Website: [www.dhl.co.th](http://www.dhl.co.th)

Call for rates and to schedule pickup service.

Delivery service is three (3) days to the USA.

## **FedEx**

Head Office (Bangkok)  
Green Tower Bldg. 8th Flr.  
3656/22-23 Rama 4 Road  
Klongton, Klongtoey  
Bangkok 10110  
Tel.: 02 229 8800 Ext. 1782

A listing of drop-off locations in the city is provided at the website : [www.fedexapac.com/th/dropoff](http://www.fedexapac.com/th/dropoff).

## ***Telephone Services***

The Telephone Organization of Thailand (TOT) is the sole authority of telephone communications. Visit the website for details of rates and services.

### **TOT Corporation Public Company Ltd.**

89/2 Moo 3, Chaeng Watthana Rd.  
Laksi, Bangkok 10210  
TOT Contact Center Tel. 1100  
E-mail: [prtoto@tot.co.th](mailto:prtoto@tot.co.th)

Telephone bills may be paid at any 7-11 store.

### ***Cell Phones***

Cell phones are so common and inexpensive that practically every noodle cart operator has one clipped to their belt just to order supplies. The best known center for cell phones and accessories is located on the fourth floor of the Mah Boon Krong Shopping Center (see chapter on shopping for location).

Next you must get a telephone number by buying a “sim card”. Most mobile phone shops sell and install sim cards. A sim card costs about US\$7.50. Before leaving the store, ask the staff to switch your language options to English.

Finally, you must put minutes on the phone by buying prepaid phone cards from any convenience store available in 200, 300, and 400 baht amounts. To activate the card, call the access number that is printed on the card, and then enter the serial number followed by #, and password followed by #. In a few seconds, the money is added to the account and you can make calls.

### **Mobile phone service providers:**

AIS: [www.ais900.com](http://www.ais900.com)

DTAC: [www.dtac.co.th](http://www.dtac.co.th)

Orange: [www.orange.co.th](http://www.orange.co.th)

### ***Domestic Calls***

Domestic calls include not only Thailand but also Malaysia and Laos. To call anywhere in the kingdom use the STD dialing and refer to the city codes listed in the phone book. Dial 101 if you want the operator to connect you for a domestic call. The lowest rates are between 10pm and 7am.

### ***Calling Bangkok Numbers***

Bangkok phone numbers all include the basic seven digits, for example 661-8952, and quite often a business or individual will provide only these digits as their number, but it is incomplete. When you are calling a Bangkok phone number from anywhere in Thailand you must include the city code 02 in the prefix, for example, 02-661-8952.

When you are outside of Thailand, the 0 is deleted from the city code and the country code 66 is added. For example, calling the above number from the USA you would dial 66 2 661 8952.

Cell phone numbers have similar prefix, for example 01 661 8952. When you make calls from outside of the country to cell phones located in Thailand the number would be 66 1 661 8952.

### ***Multiple Lines For One Business***

Phone numbers followed by a dash and a numeral indicate the number of telephone lines that are available for the same location. For example 02 399 4012-8 means that the location has seven lines and can be reached by changing the last numeral, 2, to any number up to 8. If one line is busy, change the last digit and try again.

### ***International Calls***

When making international calls from Thailand you must include the country code and area code of the phone number you are calling.

### ***Long Distance Rates***

Long distance calls can be made from hotels but Internet cafes provide the lowest rates though some of them route the calls through the Internet causing communications breakup, static and lag. When using a phone in an Internet café ask them how the call is routed.

### ***Information Operator***

Many operators speak English and will provide any number changes and addresses as required. Bangkok metropolitan area dial 13, in the provinces dial 183.

### ***Telephone Directories***

The Bangkok Metropolitan Area phone directory is printed in Thai and English versions. Note that Thais are listed by their first name and foreigners are listed by their last name.

The residential phone book is separate from the commercial book (Yellow Pages). The business centers located in hotels and Internet cafes have a complete set of phone books and they can also be found at the US Chamber of Commerce library located near the US Embassy on Wireless Road. The Chamber of Commerce also has phone books of major American cities. Directories are available from the following locations.

**Shinawatra Directories Co., Ltd.**

Shinawatra Tower 25th Flr.  
500 Paholyothin Rd.  
Tel.: 02 299 5000

**Teleinfo Media Co., Ltd.**

1376/1 Nakhon Chaisri Rd. Bangkok 10300  
Tel.: 02 243 8998  
Fax 02 243 9010  
E-mail: [customerservice@teleinfomedia.net](mailto:customerservice@teleinfomedia.net)

**Card Phones**

Public phones that use a pre-paid card are identified by their color. Phones for domestic use are orange and the ones for international calls are yellow.

Prepaid cards are available from post offices and 7-11 stores. These phones will also charge calls to credit cards and AT&T calling cards.

**Hatari Phonenet**

This is a prepaid card plan for overseas calls. The cards are sold at 7-11 Stores and allow you to call a toll-free number from any phone to make overseas, direct phone calls.

**Coin Phones**

These phones are either blue or chrome and are used for local or long-distance calls. The rates start at six baht per minute.

## **Post and Telegraph Office**

International phone calls can be made from the main government telephone office that is located at the General Post Office (GPO) on Charoen Krung Road. Telegrams and faxes may be sent from here as well. This office is open 24 hours.

## **Telegrams and Faxes**

These services are available from business centers located in hotels as well as the telephone and telegraph office of the GPO.

A fax sent to the United States costs about US\$10.

Telegrams and faxes must be prepared on the forms provided by the office.

## ***Emergency Services Numbers***

All Thailand Emergency 191  
Bangkok Mass Transit Information 184  
Telephone Directory Assistance 1133  
TAT Call Center (8am. to 8pm). 1672  
Tourist Service 02 535 2669  
Missing Person Bureau 02 282 1815  
Emergency Police Service 191  
Crime Suppression Division 195  
Police Fire Brigade 199  
Tourist Police 1155  
Highway Police Service 1193  
Ambulance and Rescue 1554  
Medical Emergency Call 1669  
Emergency Line 24 Hours 02 267 7777

## ***Internet Services***

There are hundreds of cyber cafes in Bangkok but their rates, connection speed and services vary widely.

## **JPB Business Services**

Times Square Bldg., Suite 211 Sukhumvit Rd.,  
between Sois 12 and 14  
Open from 10am to 10pm.  
Provides Internet service with 50 computers,  
and reliable hookups.

## **Cyber Restaurant**

Ambassador Hotel, Sukhumvit Soi 13  
E-mail: [amplaza@infonews.co.th](mailto:amplaza@infonews.co.th)  
Open 24 hours a day  
Equipped with 30 computers, a color printer  
and scanner. A wide selection of food and  
beverages are available.

## ***Internet Service Providers***

### **Loxley Information Services**

President Building (at Chidlom Skytrain station)  
Tel.: 02 263 8222  
E-mail: [support@csloxinfo.com](mailto:support@csloxinfo.com)  
Website: [www.csloxinfo.com](http://www.csloxinfo.com)  
This company provide both dial-up and ADSL  
connections. An example cost for ADSL is  
around US\$12 a month plus the cost for the  
modem.

### **Pacific Internet (Thailand)**

333 Lao Peng Nguan  
Tower 1 Bldg., 28th Flr.  
Soi Chaypuang, Vipavadee Rangsit Rd.  
Chatuchak, Bangkok 10900,  
Tel.: 02 618 8888  
E-mail: [info@pacific.net.th](mailto:info@pacific.net.th)  
Website: [www.pacific.net.th](http://www.pacific.net.th)

# ***Print Media***

Many newsstands and book stores stock English language magazines that are printed in Thailand as well as imported publications.

## ***Local English Newspapers and Magazines***

The most popular English language, daily newspapers are *The Bangkok Post* and *The Nation*. Both include local, regional and international events as well as advertisements for jobs and accommodations in the classified section. The Friday editions include a section called “Real Time” in the Post and “Weekend” in the Nation that list social events, movies, concerts, and performances. The papers are available at newsstands or home delivery.

### **Bangkok Post**

Tel.: 02 240 3700

Website: [www.bangkokpost.net](http://www.bangkokpost.net)

### **The Nation**

Tel.: 02 317 1400

Website: [www.nationmultimedia.com](http://www.nationmultimedia.com)

### **Magazines**

Metro Magazine

Thailand Indochina Traveler

Sawasdi

Living in Thailand

Business in Thailand

## ***International Newspapers and Magazines***

Foreign publications are available at newsstands, hotels, book shops, large department stores and



supermarkets. Listed here are just a few.

Wall Street Journal  
International Herald Tribune  
Daily Telegraph  
San Francisco Chronicle  
New York Herald Tribune  
Magazines  
The New Yorker  
Time Magazine  
Newsweek

### ***Local Radio Stations***

95.5 FM Gold FMX  
105 FM Smooth 105.5 FM Easy  
107 FM Music of the 1970s and 1980s

### ***Internet Radio Station***

[www.thaivisa.com/radio\\_bangkok.0.html](http://www.thaivisa.com/radio_bangkok.0.html)  
This is a very informative website for expatriates.

### ***Overseas Radio Stations***

Shortwave broadcasts from overseas are presented on a regular schedule. Check the *Bangkok Post* Friday insert, “Real Time” for details.

British Broadcasting World Service (BBC)  
Voice of America (VOA)  
ABC Radio Australia

### ***Television Stations***

Besides three Thai language commercial channels there are also several English language cable channels including CNN, BBC, UBC, as well as German, French, and Japanese language channels.



## *Health Care*

Health care in Bangkok is first-rate and half price. The city has ultra-modern hospitals and laboratories equipped with the latest technologies and staffed with fully trained and qualified personnel. The cost is less than half of that in the US and foreign health insurance is accepted.

In addition, the city has hundreds of clinics and pharmacies for less serious health issues that are common to the tropics.

Getting sick is the anxiety shared by all newcomers to Thailand and this concern is not baseless since the tropics are host to bacteria and diseases that are unknown in temperate climates. But you can avoid, or at least minimize the effects of most health hazards if you follow a set of preventive guidelines and seek early treatment of symptoms.

### *Climate*

It takes some newcomers a few weeks to become acclimatized to tropical weather and keeping your body cool is your primary goal. The warm temperature requires a greater intake of fluids to counter

dehydration, and the high humidity will require methods for keeping your body cool and comfortable. An electrolyte drink, *Sponsor*, is highly recommended and it is available at pharmacies and convenience stores.

Don't try to do too much in one day. When possible, plan your must-do activities for the cooler, morning or early evening hours. If you become overheated while cruising around the city, take a break inside an air conditioned shop, hotel, or restaurant.

The humidity can cause you to tire faster than in your home country. Whenever possible take a nap and a refreshing shower in the heat of the day.

## ***Food***

Any time American expatriates meet they inevitably mention the food and its effects on their digestive system. It's an American thing. But while you can certainly get Bangkok Belly from bacteria in the food or water, the condition is not common and is easy to avoid. For openers, don't eat raw seafood or meat. This is not difficult since there are only a couple of Thai meals that are not cooked at a high heat. Whether you eat at a street stall or walk-in restaurant, use your judgment as to the hygienic conditions of the place. Finally, if food looks or tastes dirty, undercooked, or unhealthy, don't eat it. The good news is that most common stomach ailments can be treated at a clinic or with medication from a pharmacy.

## ***Water***

Purified, bottled water is available at convenience stores, markets and anywhere beverages are sold. When you order water in a restaurant a bottle will be brought to your table and opened there or you will be served a glass of *nam chaa*, a weak tea that has been boiled to purify it. Never drink tap water that has not been boiled for at least 20 minutes, filtering alone will not purify the water of bacteria. The quality

of ice used in drinks is usually very good, but don't use it if it looks dirty.

### ***Immunization***

The necessity and effectiveness of immunization shots can vary. To find out more check with hospitals and the Travel Medicine and Vaccination Center (TMVC) Tel.: 02 655 1024.

### ***AIDS***

There is a high incidence of AIDS in Thailand. This disease is transmitted through sexual contact, contaminated blood used in transfusion, and the use of contaminated needles. There is no preventive vaccine available.

### ***Cholera***

Immunization is no longer recommended because of its limited duration of protection. The best protection is to carefully select the food and drink you consume.

### ***Hepatitis A***

This malady is usually contracted through contaminated food or water, especially under cooked meat and seafood. Symptoms include jaundiced eyes and skin, as well as extreme tiredness.

### ***Hepatitis B***

This is transmitted through blood, saliva and other body fluids. The highest transmission is through sexual contact.

### ***Rabies***

This disease is prevalent in all of Asia and is very serious. Though routinely associated with dogs, the virus can be carried in the salivary glands of any warm

blooded animal such as cats, monkeys, or rodents. Be very cautious around any animal that appears sick since the symptoms of the disease can vary. If you have a pet it must be inoculated by a qualified veterinarian. If you are bitten by any animal, even your own pet, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water, then apply alcohol and go to your doctor or clinic:

### **The Rabies Unit of the Thai Red Cross Society**

1873 Rama IV Road, Bangkok 10330.

Tel.: 02 252 016 Ext. 27.

Website: [www.redcross.or.th/english](http://www.redcross.or.th/english)

### ***Tetanus***

If you have never been immunized, the full course of shots is recommended. You will need a booster shot every ten years to keep the protection effective.

### ***Tuberculosis***

This disease is prevalent in all of Southeast Asia. See a doctor if you develop a persistent cough or other symptoms.

### ***Typhus***

The best protection is personal and household hygiene although an oral vaccine is available.

### ***Dengue Fever***

While Bangkok is free from malaria, it does have the *Aedes* mosquito that carries dengue fever. Symptoms include severe headache and bone ache, a skin rash and fever and chills. There is no immunization for this disease so preventive measures must be taken around your house to prevent the breeding of mosquitoes. These include changing water in flower vases daily, and keeping water drains clear.

# *Medical Care*

Bangkok has gained an international reputation for high quality medical care that is available at very low costs. The clientele includes patients from Asia, the Near East, Europe, and the Americas. This upsurge in popularity is the result of the modernization of Thai hospitals, medical procedures, and training standards of the medical staff that have been instituted over the past decade.

## *Hospitals*

New hospitals have been built and older ones so remodeled that many of them resemble five-star hotels. They are furnished with the latest computerized diagnostic and therapeutic equipment. Many have extended their emergency services to include helicopter ambulances, and doctors on wheels who make house calls in fully equipped ambulances, as well as medical teams that use motorcycles in emergencies.

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## *Certification*

In addition to upgrading the facilities and services Thai hospitals have made great strides in the standardization and recording of medical procedures and patient histories. Many of them are now certified with the ISO Standards that ensure quality procedures are followed and documented in every case. These Standards have been audited and approved by a third-party, internationally recognized agency for quality compliance. Every event of patient treatment is done and recorded according to specified procedures.

ISO procedures begin with the very first contact the patient makes with the hospital, whether by telephone or in person, and are followed through every step of the patient's, treatment, medication, discharge from hospital and follow-up communications.

These records are kept on a database and audited every six months by an independent, third-party auditing agency to ensure that the procedures are being followed or if new procedures need to be implemented. A hospital that is not complying with the ISO strictures will lose its accreditation.

While ISO accreditation is not very important in the USA, in Europe and Asia it is a vital endorsement of the hospital's commitment to quality assurance and customer satisfaction.

### ***Staffing***

Thai hospitals are always well staffed. Visit any hospital and you will see an abundance of uniformed nurses, aides, and administrative staff. They are well trained, efficient, courteous, and very caring. I have found these characteristics to be consistent in all levels of hospitals, from the lowest priced to the most expensive.

Working in the medical profession is considered a very respectable career. The hospital staff is highly motivated and takes their profession very seriously. In addition, ISO standards ensure that staff training is continuous and positions are never a "fill-in as needed" occupation. There are several medical universities in Bangkok that are fully accredited and recognized by foreign countries. These universities are equipped with modern technology and provide up-to-date training for doctors, nurses, and technicians. That Thai medical graduates are up to the standards of Western countries is proven by the ongoing recruitment of Thai graduates to work in the USA.

## ***The Hospital Experience***

While living in Thailand my wife and I have had occasions to go to the hospital for minor injuries. One time she was involved in a tuk-tuk accident that

split her scalp about an inch. She took a taxi to Samitivej Hospital where a doctor showed up within 5 minutes. He cauterized and stitched the wound and the cost came to US\$35 including the medication.

My wife was immediately attended to without any preliminary paperwork and for emergencies this is the usual procedure. But for scheduled operations the hospitals require a deposit up to 20,000 baht (about US\$500) and maybe your passport, or proof of medical insurance before admission. One thing common to all hospitals is that the bill must be settled before you are released.

A friend of mine, a photo-journalist, had recently returned from an assignment in Africa and after a few days became ill with sweats and chills, classic symptoms of malaria.

“I was so feeble that I nearly passed out while hailing a cab to take me to the hospital,” he said. “I went to Bangkok Nursing Home and stayed conscious long enough to give them my insurance card and request one of their best rooms. Then the staff hustled me off for treatment.”

It turned out that he had contracted a new strain of malaria in Africa and the doctor was up to speed on the diagnosis and treatment. He remained in the hospital for seven days during which he was treated by the doctor twice a day and his condition was monitored by nurses four times a day.

“I can’t say enough about the care and attention I received. Not only was the room superb, the staff pleasant and caring, but also the bill was only \$2000 for the seven day stay, and it had been processed through the insurance company by the time I was released.”

A couple of years ago I went to Bumrungrad Hospital for cataract surgery. The reception staff called up the records of my phoned-in appointment, and issued me an identification card with a bar code that would be used to call up my records on



subsequent visits. The process took less than five minutes and then I sat in the waiting area with other patients. Trays with cups of chilled water were placed nearby and two TV sets were suspended from the ceiling tuned to popular channels.

A team of nursing aides stood along one wall waiting for a summons from the receptionist. When they were called, they would get the patient's file and move through the waiting area calling out the patient's name.

"Mister Lobert. Mister Lobert." It's important to know that in Thailand, you will most likely be summoned by your first name and learn what it sounds like when a Thai pronounces it.

The aide administered the preliminary tests and brought the results when I was ushered into the doctor's office. The doctor had worked for four years in Tennessee hospitals and spoke flawless English. He showed me the results of the tests and scheduled a time for the operation.

Three days later, the operation was undertaken. Four nurses were in attendance, quietly working, and attending to my comfort. The operation was done by laser surgery and took about an hour. It was painless and did not require anesthetic. Afterwards, I rested for a while and a nurse checked up on me every ten minutes. Then the surgeon visited me and when he was satisfied there were no complications he taped a protective cup over the eye.

At the reception desk I was given some antibiotic medication and informed that they would call me the next day between 9:30 and 10am.

Finally, I went to the cashier where I paid the bill, US\$870, with a credit card.

At 9:45 the next morning, the hospital called me to inquire about my condition. "Do you feel any pain? Is the eye weeping? Is it bothersome? Have you taken the medication? Do you want to have it examined today?"

This was my first surgical experience in a Thai hospital and I was put at ease by the professional attitudes and demeanor of the staff. They exhibited a sense of care, compassion, and genuine interest in the welfare of patients.

## *Hospitals in Bangkok*

The following list of hospitals offer full service with departments in internal medicine, cardiology, cancer, neurology, immunology, gastroenterology, dermatology, cosmetic surgery, dentistry, EENT, as well as traditional medicine. Many of the doctors and surgeons have trained in Europe or the US and speak English as well as other languages. Most of these hospitals accept foreign insurance payments but you must check with the Administration Department for the list of qualified insurers. You can E-mail the hospital or visit their websites for more details.

This is a listing of the most noted hospitals. Visit a few of them before making your choice. The costs provided below were accurate in 2005 and are subject to change. At this time 40 baht = US\$1.

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### **Bangkok General Hospital**

2 Soi 7, Soi Soonvijai

New Petchburi Rd.

Tel.: 02 310 3344

E-mail: [admin@bgh.co.th](mailto:admin@bgh.co.th)

Website: [www.bangkokhospital.com](http://www.bangkokhospital.com)

Established in 1972, this is one of the biggest hospitals in Thailand with more than 400 full-time & consultant physicians and 600 nurses. It has branches in many provinces throughout the kingdom and was the first private hospital in Thailand to receive ISO 9002 accreditation. Because of its specialty in cardiology it has a reputation in Asia as the “Heart Hospital.”

The hospital also has an International Medical Center (IMC) where the staff speaks English as well as other foreign languages.

<b>Room Type</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Nurse</b>	<b>Service</b>	<b>Meal</b>
Superior	6000	1600	1036	750
Deluxe	5700	1600	855	750
Single	2500	1300	375	360
ICU	3500	2500	525	360

### **BNH Hospital (Bangkok Nursing Home)**

9/1 Convent Rd.

Tel.: 02 632 0552

Fax: 02 632 0577

E-mail: [info@bangkoknursinghome.com](mailto:info@bangkoknursinghome.com)

Website: [www.bnhhospital.com](http://www.bnhhospital.com)

Established in 1897, this hospital is rated very highly by both expatriates and Thais. This 225-bed, facility meets international standards and is furnished with the latest diagnostic and treatment equipment. It is staffed by English speaking physicians in every field of medicine.

<b>Type</b>	<b>Rate</b>
Deluxe Room	5600
VIP Room	8850
ICU	6150

### **Bumrungrad Hospital**

33 Soi 3, Sukhumvit Rd.

Tel.: 02 667 1000

Fax: 02 667 2525

E-mail: [info@bumrungrad.com](mailto:info@bumrungrad.com)

Website: [www.bumrungrad.com](http://www.bumrungrad.com)

This American managed, ISO 9002 certified hospital was established in 1980 and in 1997 it commissioned its new, 12 stories, 554 bed facility and equipped it with the latest diagnostic and treatment equipment available. It is the largest private hospital in Southeast Asia and includes a heliport for air ambulance service.

The staff comprises 600 physicians and dentists, most with international training and certification. English and other foreign languages are spoken.

<b>Room Type</b>	<b>Rate</b>
Four Bed Room	600
Two Bed Room	1200
Single Room	2500
Single Deluxe	3600
Intensive Care	3600

### **Meals**

Suite	460
Single Room	390
2-4 Bedroom	330
ICU	390

### **Long-Term Care Apartments**

The Bumrungrad Hospital Residence is a 74 room, serviced apartment building with 2 room and studio apartments to accommodate the special needs of patients, family and visitors. It is connected by an air conditioned elevated walkway to the hospital. The Residence has a range of accommodation for individuals and families and is within easy walking distance of restaurants, shopping and entertainment venues as well as the Skytrain service.

The rooms are furnished with International Cable TV, VCR, hotpot, dishware & glasses, individually controlled air conditioning, local & international telephone, kitchen with a microwave oven, refrigerator, and mini-bar.

### **Apartment Rates**

	<b>Day</b>	<b>Week</b>	<b>Month</b>
Studio	1000	6,300	24,000
One bedroom	1500	9,450	36,000
VIP Suites	2400	15,120	58,500
Exec Suite	3200	20,160	65,800

## Samitivej Hospital

133 Soi 49, Sukhumvit Rd.  
Tel.: 02 711 8000  
Fax: 02 2391 1290  
E-mail: [info@samitivej.co.th](mailto:info@samitivej.co.th)  
Website: [www.samitivej.co.th](http://www.samitivej.co.th)

The hospital has 250 inpatient rooms and 87 examination rooms. Its staff comprises 1200 full-time doctors, dentists, nurses, and technicians.

The accredited, English speaking medical specialists, many with international training and its modern facilities make Samitivej Sukhumvit Hospital a favorite with expatriates and foreign visitors.

<b>Room type</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Nursing</b>	<b>Service</b>
VIP	4200	800	400
Deluxe	3500	800	400
Superior	2500	800	400
Private	1700	800	300
ICU 1	4100	1600	400

<b>Meals</b>	<b>Cost Per Day</b>
Thai food	350
Western food	480
Tube feeding	330
Liquid diet	250

## St. Louis Hospital

25 Sathorn Tai (South) Rd.  
Tel.: 02 675 5000  
Fax: 02 675 5200.  
E-mail: [contact@saintlouis.or.th](mailto:contact@saintlouis.or.th)  
Website: [www.saintlouis.or.th](http://www.saintlouis.or.th)

This thoroughly modern hospital is furnished with state-of-the-art medical equipment and staffed with accredited physicians, technicians and nurses. It is certified to ISO Standards.

The Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and Cardiac Care Unit (CCU) operating rooms were specially designed and made in Germany with individually controlled sterilization systems and furnished with modern operating and monitoring equipment.

<b>Room Type</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Nurse Care</b>
Common Room	600	300
Twins Room	1,200	300
Single Room	2,000	300
V.I.P. Suite	5,000	300
President Suite	8,000	800
ICU	2,000	600

### **Amenities Included**

Common Room — meals, a set of personal effects

Twin Room — meals, a set of personal effects, television, thermos jug

Suite/Single Room — meals, a set of personal effects cable television, refrigerator, telephone, thermos jug, microwave oven

### ***Government Hospitals***

In case of an accident where you are unable to say which hospital you wish to go to you will be taken to a government hospital.

An American friend was involved in a serious motorcycle accident that broke his leg, shoulder and dented some other parts. He regained consciousness in the Police Hospital and since he was short on money he elected to stay there for the treatment. I was skeptical about the care he might receive for two dollars a day, including meals, and visited him often over the months he spent in the ward with about 30 other patients. They were also victims of motorcycle accidents, and like him, they lay on their backs with their arms and legs encased in plaster casts and suspended by wires.



His right ankle was shattered so badly that the doctor didn't think he could save the leg, and in this low-rent hospital, he didn't have the fully skilled staff to devote to the operation. But if my friend was willing the doctor would assign his student interns to the job. My friend agreed and over the following months, the

interns were guided by the doctor and carried out several operations that saved his leg. Even more, he emerged without infection or even a limp. The bill came to US\$2000.

My friend still lives in Thailand where he travels around the country for a beneficial organization that gives prosthetic limbs to amputees while being a monk. That's a curious twist of karma.

### **Rajavithi General**

Rajavithi Rd.  
Tel.: 02 281 1246  
Fax: 02 246 8270

### **Police Hospital**

Rama I Rd.  
Tel.: 02 252 8111-25

## ***Dentistry***

I have visited Thai dentists on a number of occasions and have always been satisfied with their skill levels. Recently, I visited the dentist and, over four visits, had five fillings and teeth cleaned for US\$150.

## ***Dental Clinics***

All of the major hospitals have dentistry departments and there are hundreds of dental clinics throughout the city. Below are listed some of the more well known clinics. This listing is not an endorsement but is intended to give you some places to start your search and an idea of the prices.

### **Bangkok Smile**

546/2 Ploenchit Rd.  
(opposite British Embassy)  
Tel.: 02 251 4982  
E-mail: [contact@bangkoksmiledental.com](mailto:contact@bangkoksmiledental.com)  
Website: [www.bangkoksmiledental.com](http://www.bangkoksmiledental.com)

This is a full-service dental clinic furnished with the most modern operational equipment and employing the most modern hygienic procedures. Visit the website for a list of services and costs.

### **Bangkok Dental Clinic**

347 Samsen Rd.  
Tel.: 02 281 6296  
E-mail: [bkdenta@yahoo.com](mailto:bkdenta@yahoo.com)  
Website: [www.geocities.com/bkdental](http://www.geocities.com/bkdental)

The clinic is equipped with modern facilities and staffed by well qualified, English speaking dentists. Visit the website for a list of services and costs.

## ***Eyes, Ears, Nose and Throat***

All major hospitals have EENT Departments. The listing below is intended as a guide, not an endorsement, to clinics that specialize in these areas.

In 2004, I went to the Rutnin Eye Center for an eye examination. This is a well respected clinic and a favorite among the Thais, including His Majesty, the King. The Center had recently moved into a new



building and had installed the latest equipment available. While I waited, an Australian woman came up to me and asked if I needed any help. She was hired by the hospital to assist English speaking patients through the admittance process. The exam took about 30 minutes and included a scan of my eye with a computerized instrument that took cross section pictures and projected them onto a screen where the doctor pointed out the various conditions of the eye. The exam and medication cost US\$25.

### **Rutnin Eye Hospital**

80/1 Soi 21 Sukhumvit Rd. (Soi Asoke)

Tel.: 02 639 3399

Fax: 02 639 3311

Website: [www.rutnin.com/html/our.html](http://www.rutnin.com/html/our.html)

Founded in 1964 this is Thailand's first private hospital specializing exclusively in Ophthalmology and is highly regarded by Thais and foreigners alike. The staff comprises 29 Board Certified surgeons in every sub-specialty of the eye including the cornea, glaucoma, neuro-ophthalmology, vitreo-retina, oculoplastics, pediatric ophthalmology and excimer laser refractive surgery. In 2004 the hospital moved into a new building and installed the very latest in diagnostic and treatment equipment.

### **TRSC International LASIK Center**

U Chu Liang Bldg., 6<sup>th</sup> Flr.

968 Rama IV Rd.

Silom, Bangrak, Bangkok

Tel.: 02 733 2020

Fax 02 632 4431

E-mail: [inter@lasikthai.com](mailto:inter@lasikthai.com)

Website: [www.lasikthai.com](http://www.lasikthai.com)

This center was founded in 1997 and is certified to ISO 9000 Standards. It specializes in surgical correction for nearsightedness, farsightedness, and astigmatism. Visit the website for details on procedures and costs.

## ***Pharmacies***

Hospitals have on-site dispensaries and there are hundreds of pharmacies throughout the city where medication can be purchased without a prescription. Since many European pharmaceutical companies have factories in Thailand and the cost for drugs very reasonable. The stores listed below have pharmacies with English speaking staff.

### **Charoen Pharmacy**

Located on Sukhumvit Road 30 meters west of Soi 4 (Nana).

This family-owned pharmacy has been here for 30 years and is a favorite among the expatriate community. It is not only a fully stocked pharmacy but also stocks sundry items required by visitors. The prices are competitive and English is spoken.

## ***Health Insurance***

Many hospitals accept US insurance payments and when you live in Thailand you may wish to get a local insurer.

### **BUPA Blue Cross**

38 Q House Convent Bldg., 9th Flr  
Convent Rd.

Tel.: 02 234 7755

Website: [www.bupaThailand.com](http://www.bupaThailand.com)

**AETNA OSOTSPA**

Tel.: 02 6514845  
Fax: 02 236 9375

**Bangkok Life Assurance**

Tel.: 02 203 0055  
Fax: 02 541 5545

**Muang Thai Healthcare**

Tel.: 02 276 1025  
Fax: 02 277 8391

**Thai Health Insurance**

Tel.: 02 246 9680  
Fax: 02 246 9806

**ACE Accident and Health Insurance**

02 655 4088

**New Hampshire Health Insurance**

02 638 7941

## *Traditional Medicine*

Bangkok has numerous venues for acupuncture and chiropractic treatments as well as massage and herbal remedies. As a writer without a disciplined, exercise program I often get muscle cramps in my shoulders. I was writing a magazine article and pushing hard to meet the deadline when I noticed that my right shoulder was practically in my ear. The muscle was under tension. When it happened before I visited an acupuncturist that I had been going to but he had moved to Europe. Now I had to find a new practitioner.

From my Sukhumvit apartment I caught an air conditioned bus to Chinatown and went to an herb shop on Yaowarat Road. A huge one with walls 15 feet high lined from floor to ceiling with what looked like letter boxes each one bearing a label. Clerks climbed ladders to get the boxes and bring them to

the counter where the apothecary selected a leaf from one, a bit of root from another and various other dried things which he used to prepare remedies.

Besides the appearance of the shop with its hundreds of boxes and various roots, leaves and herbs on display in the glass cases, the most overpowering sensation is the smell. It wasn't offensive, just a pungent, earthy aroma that you get when all these potent plants are put into one room. I went there since they would know of an acupuncturist, and they did. They told me of a man who hung his shingle in a nearby temple.

I found the temple easily enough, but wandered around the grounds for 15 minutes before I discovered the acupuncturist tucked away in an alcove. He was a slightly built, Chinese man in his sixties who carried the air of a competent healer though his open air office was a light year away from the air conditioned one of my last doctor's. It was simply furnished with a wooden table and a couple of folding chairs.

132 He invited me to sit down, poured me a glass of iced *nam chaa*, and asked what was wrong. I told him about my shoulder problem. He squeezed it a couple of times, nodded knowingly and asked if I took any Western medicine. We talked for a while during which I found out that he was from Shanghai and had lived in Bangkok for 30 years. Then he showed me a sheaf of reference letters from foreigners that he had treated. They were convincing letters and didn't appear to be forged, so I said, okay, poke me with the needles. "Not here," he said, "we go to your house." He got his case of needles, put a "Be back soon" sign on his desk and we left the temple.

"Let's take a taxi," I said. It was only about a \$5 fare.

"No. We take the bus."

At the bus stop I said, "Let's take the air conditioned bus," a 25 cent fare.

“No. We take the regular bus.” A seven cent ride.

We managed to get seats and 30 minutes later arrived at my apartment. I took off my shirt and he poked a couple of needles into the shoulder muscle and within minutes the shoulder dropped to its normal position and I could turn my head easily, which I couldn't do before.

“How much do I owe you?” I asked, not having any idea how much a house call might run.

“Oh, 200 or 250 baht,” he answered politely. This equaled eight to ten dollars.

Today, traditional healers are not difficult to find since most major hospitals now have a Traditional Medicine Center. Here are some locations to get you started.

### **BNH Hospital**

Dr. Manee (lady doctor) Tel.: 02 632 0560

### **Siriraj Hospital**

Tel.: 02 641 7777  
Acupuncture Clinic

### **Wat Po Traditional Medicine School of Thailand**

Located in Wat Po  
Patients are treated in the late afternoon.

## ***Self-Help Organizations***

### **Alcoholics Anonymous**

Tel.: 02 231 8300  
Website: [www.aathailand.org](http://www.aathailand.org)

Meetings are held every day in the Rectory of the Holy Redeemer Church 123/19 Soi 5 Ruam Rudi

### **Narcotics Anonymous**

Tel.: 02 256 6305



## *City Life*

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In Bangkok, you will rarely hear a police siren, witness a shootout, a car chase or other sights and sounds of cops and robbers activities so familiar in American cities. Except for the occasional gold shop robbery, crime involving guns and getaway motorcycles is a rare occurrence.

What's more, the city does not have areas where street crime goes with the territory and holdups, muggings, or rapes are uncommon. Finally, since Thais rarely display feelings of racial or ethnic resentment it's very unlikely that you will be singled out or taunted.

You won't need to arm yourself for protection; in fact, it's not even a good idea. In all my travels throughout the kingdom, I carried only a Leatherman tool and unless you are involved in an enemy making activity that's about all you'll need.

That's not to say that if you get drunk and flash a lot of cash you won't get rolled, or if you wear gold



chains they won't get snatched, that can happen anywhere but the chances are good that you won't be physically harmed.

### ***Traffic Smarts***

Traffic accidents are the most common, physical threats in the city and the key to avoiding them is caution and timing.

Thais believe in karma and reincarnation; that they will not die before their time and then they will be reborn. This faith is clearly demonstrated in their driving style. Motorcycles race along at breakneck speed, weaving in and out of the traffic with only inches to spare. Vendors push noodle carts in the fast moving stream of traffic oblivious to the vehicles barely skimming by or dogging their heels. A friend of mine calls Bangkok "The Land of The Close Shave". Here, how close people come to having an accident doesn't count. A vehicle cutting in front of another vehicle is not a reason for road rage. As a taxi driver explained it, "He must belong there since he is there." Karma. You are where you are supposed to be or you wouldn't be there. That's the best I can figure it out.

For the most part the drivers remain courteous to each other, no hand or foot gestures, no cursing each other, no road rage attacks. When accidents do occur drivers usually reach for their wallets, not their guns.

- √ If, when crossing a street, a vehicle passes within inches of you, don't get angry at the driver. He is long gone and thought of you as only an obstacle. Instead, feel grateful that you weren't hit. When you are crossing a street, anger is a luxury not a survival instinct.
- √ Don't daydream or hold hands with your significant other when crossing busy roads. Independent action is safer.
- √ Drivers will not automatically give pedestrians the right of way, even in marked crossing zones. The safest way to cross busy roads is by using the pedestrian overpass or crossing in a crowd, preferably alongside a pregnant woman. For some reason, Thai drivers give a lot of space to pregnant women.
- √ When crossing the street, the drill is to look to your right, then left, then right again. Follow this rule even on one way streets since motorcycles and bus lanes often go against the traffic flow.
- √ If you are struck by a car the driver is responsible for taking you to the hospital and paying the bill. This happened to me in a minor accident and the driver lived up to his obligation. But if for some reason this is not possible, take a taxi since getting an ambulance to the scene of an accident in a reasonable time is not always possible. There are hundreds of hospitals and clinics in the city so there is probably one within a mile or so of your location. Taxi drivers may refuse if you are bloody so you may



need to go by tuk-tuk.

- √ As an unwritten rule, the ranking order of fault in an accident is determined by the comparative sizes of the vehicles involved using the premise that the larger vehicle is at fault. A truck or bus that runs into a car is at fault. A car that runs into a tuk-tuk is at fault. A tuk-tuk that runs into a motorcycle or bicycle is at fault. Anything with wheels that runs into a pedestrian or an elephant is at fault.
- √ Be especially alert when crossing at wide intersections equipped with traffic signals. During the red light, motorbikes filter through the cars to get as close to front rank as possible. When the light changes to green they take off like it was a moto cross event with dozens of machines going for the gold.

## *Street Smarts*

While you probably won't meet with a weapon flashing robber you could be singled out by con artists, pickpockets, cutpurses, or grab-and-run thieves. This can happen to anyone, Thais included, so don't let anxiety run your life but take some precautions that will keep you out of harm's way.

You may be approached by street touts offering "genuine" emeralds and rubies "smuggled" in from Burma at ridiculously low prices. Others hit on you with the lure of a card game. The games are rigged so that the house always wins. Even if you know that you have been cheated there's no recourse since gambling is illegal in Thailand.

In the Sukhumvit Road and Silom Road areas, you may be approached by a man who quietly asks if you want a massage and discretely shows you a small, color brochure of the parlor and masseuses. He will

take you in his “taxi” but won’t mention the exorbitant cost for his services until you want to leave the parlor. You will have to pay and you cannot go to the police on this one. Believe it or not, prostitution is illegal in Thailand.

Bangkok’s night life is famous for its bustle, and infamous for its hustlers. On my first visit, I stayed at the Malaysia Hotel, a popular place with the backpacking set of which I was a part. There was a bulletin board provided for the use of the guests where I read this message.

“I want to warn everyone. Be careful when you go out with the Thai ladies. They are not to be trusted. They are thieves. I met two girls in a bar beer and took them to my hotel room. They told me to shower first. So I did, and when I came out they were running out the door. One was carrying my pants and the other one had my shoes. I chased them down the hall but since I was naked I went back to my room and discovered that they took all my money and my watch. These girls are thieves.”

Under this message someone scrawled, “Hey, chum, next time bring your mum.”

The con artists are persuasive and there is no shame in being naive, once. But it can be harmful. Be cautious if you visit the “entertainment plazas,” areas with beer bars and pole dancers favored by farangs. They are safe enough for the most part, and while you won’t be robbed in the usual sense every effort will be made to separate you from your money. Some bars offer an exotic floor show and “no cover charge” but the price of drinks is exorbitant and you won’t get out without paying. Keep your radar tuned up for offers too good to be true, they probably are.

Most of the rip offs you will experience will be of the overcharge and shortchange variety. Before you buy something, always ask how much it is and always check the bills at restaurants and hotels. They are sometimes incorrect but I can’t say that the errors

are on purpose since I've been undercharged as well as overcharged. Whenever you have a money problem like this, maintain your cool at all times. No threats, no heavy arguments. If it is a meaningful amount, call the Tourist Police.

### ***The Gem Scam***

Newcomers to Bangkok are often dazzled by the abundance of gemstones for sale and it is on them that the Gem Scam is most effective.

One popular variation to this rip-off begins with a ride in a tuk-tuk during which the driver tells you that you are in luck since he is specially trained to be helpful to tourists. Then he mentions that the government has just launched a promotion to sell gems to tourists, at very low prices.

If you show an interest, the tuk-tuk driver will drive around until he “accidentally” meets a well dressed, distinguished looking man. The man claims that he works for the government and shows you his “government” identification card. It could be his health club card but since it written in Thai, how would you know?. This person confirms the “government gems sales” story.

If you take the bait and go to the “government” jewelry store you are told that it's possible to make 100 to 150% profit by reselling the gems back home. As a final touch, the seller writes a vague guarantee of authenticity and puts an official looking stamp on it. Later you discover that the gems were nowhere near the money that you paid for them. There is very little recourse for recovering your money.

### ***The Rare Coin Game***

“Genuine antiques” is another scam to be wary of. Skilled craftsmen can make a reproduction appear to be as old as dirt.

A friend from Hawaii stayed with me on his first

visit to Bangkok. He was a self-assured fellow but had never been traveling before and was ready for picking. Fortunately for him, he only got slightly plucked.

He returned to my apartment after a day of exploring the city wearing a smug, “I got a good deal” look on his face.

“Have I got something to show you,” he said as he pulled a small sack from his day pack. He smiled as he shook it, making a clinking sound. Then he upended it and poured a pile of dirty, copper coins on a table.

“Check this out,” he said.

The coins were of different sizes, dull, and coated with a patina of encrusted mud. They appeared to be very old.

“I was walking on Sukhumvit when I saw this old man sitting on a blanket with a pile of these coins. He was washing them in a small pan of water. They obviously had been dredged up from the river or one of the canals. I don’t think the old man knew what they were worth. He sold me this bag full for twenty dollars. These are collectible’s coins!”

Two things were wrong with my friend’s assumptions. First of all, he knew nothing about rare coins, and secondly, he didn’t know that there were dozens of these “coin men” in Bangkok, all selling the same way, on a blanket with a pile of muddy coins and acting very naive. What’s more they all buy their coins from the rare coin makers in Chinatown.



## ***Making Acquaintances***

Be wary, not afraid. The great majority of Thais are friendly, polite, helpful, and ready to return a smile. On your city walks you will pass many street vendors who will smile and ask, “Where you go,” as an icebreaker phrase. A common answer is, “just for a walk.”

Many Thais speak a little English and want to try it out, giving you an opportunity to make acquaintances. If you are friendly, polite, and outgoing you will have little trouble meeting Thais and you will be on safe ground if you don’t divulge too much of your personal life, keep the conversation on general topics. You can control its course by asking the questions. “Are you from Bangkok?” “Where did you learn English?” “Is it always this hot?”

“Where did you learn English?” “Is it always this hot?”

Friendly bargaining is another way to make acquaintances. You don’t need to buy anything. Thais make friends easily and after a few weeks you should know a few people that you trust not to give you a bum steer.

## ***Meeting Foreigners***

Bangkok’s expatriate community is made up of people from America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Russia, China, Australia, and all parts of Asia. Don’t get the idea that just because someone is the same race, color or nationality as you that they will be honest with you.

## ***Police Procedures***

When Westerners talk about police corruption in Thailand their opinions are based on the judicial systems of their homeland where citations are issued for misdemeanor crimes and the accused are given

the opportunity to pay the fine at a later date or appear in court. In Thailand a person charged with a misdemeanor can pay the fine to the arresting officer or go to jail, go to court, and then pay the fine. Since the judicial system is based on the French model where you are guilty until proven innocent there is only a remote chance you will win the case. It's best to pay the fine on the spot since the more people that are involved, the more it costs. The good news is that the fine is negotiable.



For example, I was waiting at a bus stop on Sukhumvit when without thinking I dropped a candy wrapper on the ground. A few seconds later, a young policeman wearing a custom fitted, brown uniform and a cap with a high peak like a German Army officer's, came up to me and pointed to the ground. I immediately realized what he meant and gave an embarrassed smile as I picked up the wrapper. He indicated with a slight motion of his hand to follow him. We walked up Sukhumvit one block to his post, a small, open air police kiosk. There he pointed to a sign board printed in Thai and English stating that littering is a 2000 baht fine. He went into the kiosk and I walked over to face him. He gave me a brochure with the littering law spelled out in English and the 2000 baht in large, red letters.

“You understand?” He asked in English.

I answered in Thai, “Khaochai, khrap,” I understand, sir.

He shuffled some papers, brought out his pen and stalled as he thought it over then said, “The fine is 2000 baht. Or a favorable amount.”

I took my time in answering, looking deep in

thought, then said, “Sawng loy baht, okay?” Two hundred baht, okay? Every Thai understands okay.

He took his time in answering, rubbed his chin, rustled the papers on the desk, then looked up at me. “Okay. Sawng loy baht.” I took the money off my clip as he reached for a small book, “Do you want a receipt,” He asked in English.

“No, thank you. I don’t need one.” What for? To write off on my taxes? I don’t care what happens to the money after I give it to him. It’s only US\$5.

Some people say this encourages police corruption. Maybe it does but what are the options in this or in any similar encounter with the police? I want to see your chief? I want to call the American Embassy? I find it very easy to live in a country where you can pay a policeman to leave you alone.

### *Paying Fines*

Be aware that the fine will probably increase as you go up the chain of command. Your best deal is the first one you can make. One last note of caution, if you insist on seeing the officer’s superior you may be taken there, hands cuffed behind your back, sandwiched between two cops on the seat of a 125 cc Yamaha motorcycle. Police don’t use patrol cars in Bangkok.

The police often set up checkpoints on busy roads and pull over vehicles at random. Practically every vehicle ends up paying a “fine” whether they did something illegal at that moment or not. “That’s a shakedown,” cry the farang motorists, “I didn’t do anything wrong!” Maybe not then, but there’s not a driver in Bangkok who isn’t guilty of a couple of dozen illegal turns, or other slight infractions. It’s pay up time. Bargain.

This method of fine collection doesn’t give all the money to the arresting officer. He’s the collector of fines and has to pipe some of it up the chain.

These fines increase his income, those of his superiors and the department in general. Cops in Thailand are not overpaid. I have met several policemen while teaching English and they explained their side of the story. Their method of fine collection may not agree with your morals and ethics but it works here.

Certainly there are abuses of this system but there is no police force in the world that is not corrupt to one degree or another. There have been reports of Thai policemen shaking down farangs on real or trumped up charges and the usual drill is to coerce the “offender” to make cash withdrawals from an ATM machine to pay the “fine.”

### ***Police Conduct***

Physical abuse by police probably occurs, but in 12 years of living in Thailand I've never heard a first hand story or witnessed police brutality. The police don't want blood, they want money. If you go along without resistance, you will probably not be harmed.

My first observation of police procedures took place at the Atlanta Hotel on Soi 2 Sukhumvit. I arrived in town from Chiang Mai one morning and went to the hotel at the dead end of the soi. As I approached I saw three shiny black, pickup trucks on the street and a large semi circle of armed soldiers watching the entrance. As I got closer, I could hear yelling from inside the hotel. An unsmiling soldier who had been watching me approach signaled me over to him. He motioned for me to put my backpack on the ground and indicated that I should open it. He gave it a cursory search then nodded to indicate that he was finished. I closed the pack and stood there waiting for more directions. I gave him a palm up sign and looked at the hotel as if to ask, what's going on? He just smiled, shook his head and said, “My pen rai.” Never mind.



I soon realized it was a drug raid as an occasional farang, not handcuffed and not even being held onto by his captors, was escorted out of the building and seated in a truck bed. There was no shoving or shouting. Nobody was up against the wall, arms outstretched, legs spread, with guns shoved into their necks, and no one was being beaten. The police spoke in normal tones — the yelling was from the hotel residents — and went about their job without fuss, blood, or bullets. They collected about ten people then loaded the soldiers up and left without sirens or even screeching tires.

Another police incident I witnessed occurred in a bar where a big, German man had drunk too much and became threatening to the bartender and the Thai girls who worked there. After awhile a cop was called and he tried to get the German to leave peacefully, but the man wasn't through ranting and was beating his fist on the bar while swearing at the bartender. The cop simply grabbed the man's wrist, pressed his finger onto the pressure point and in a moment the German was buckling at the knees. The cop led him outside and let him go.



## *Social Customs*

The Thai people are very unified since their social fabric has not been torn by civil war and the kingdom has never been colonized by foreign nations. Another unifying thread is that the overwhelming majority is Buddhist and involve themselves fully and cooperatively in the maintenance of their religion on a daily basis.

Then too, Thais are customarily involved in community projects from an early age. They help with chores around the village, tending buffalo, and helping with the rice harvest. In addition, school projects don't leave anyone off of the duty roster. In the provinces, it's common for the schoolchildren to pitch in on the maintenance and repair of their school. This includes

cleaning the toilets, clearing weeds, planting flowers, painting and any other tasks within their capabilities. It's here that Thais form the discipline, teamwork, and respect for authority they need to bond effectively with their society.

Thai social life is regulated not only by recorded laws, but also by unwritten customs. Even though the population of the kingdom has several ethnic groups and various religions, the customs of the Thai people are the accepted norm.

In most cases, offending these customs will only cause you to lose some social "face." The Thais will give you some slack for your ignorance, but offenses against the religion or royal family are taken very seriously. On the island of Koh Samui, a French couple were surrounded by angry villagers when they were discovered posing on a statue of Buddha while taking photo's. The Tourist Police showed up in time to save the couple from serious harassment, and then fined them.

While the observance of social customs is taken seriously by Thais, Westerners sometimes balk at the idea. I have no problem adopting the customs of Thais since observing them opens a new dimension in acceptance.

## ***National and Royal Customs***

Twice each day, at 8am and 6pm the National Anthem is played over the radio and television stations as well as through loudspeakers at government offices and schools. In small towns and villages, vehicles stop where they are and pedestrians stand respectfully. It's over in a couple of minutes and life picks up where it left off, like a freeze frame in a movie. Stopping the flow of traffic in Bangkok at these hours is not feasible, though much of it is already involuntarily stalled, but Thais everywhere stop what they are doing and reaffirm their

commitment to the nation. I knew one senior citizen who snapped to attention, ramrod straight, chest out, stomach in, chin tucked like a drill sergeant's, and eyes focused ahead. This was in his house.

The Royal Anthem honoring the monarchy is played before sports events, stage productions, concerts, and everyone stands in silence until it is over. Movie theaters play the anthem and show pictures of the royal family inspecting government projects, establishing health and education services and providing welfare to the people. The entire audience rises when the music begins.

At one theater, I was seated behind a blond haired fellow and a Thai girl who chatted with each other quietly, as though on a first date. When the audience stood up for the Royal Anthem she noticed that her boyfriend was still seated. When she urged him to stand up he said in a loud voice, "I don't stand for no man!" No one turned to look at him. They probably didn't care whether he stood up or not, but the girl was no doubt embarrassed by his rudeness. A few minutes after the movie started she left her seat and didn't return.

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You are not required by law to observe these unwritten rules of social conduct but trying your best not to violate them will certainly enhance your life in Thailand. Even clumsy and inept attempts to follow them will earn you respect and esteem from the people you come into contact with. You are not giving up anything by adhering to these customs. Instead, you are gaining the knowledge of a different way of life. That's what living in Thailand is all about.

## *One to One Customs*

The interpretations of social customs given here come from research as well as my own experiences. This list is not a full index but a selection that will smooth your entry into Thai society. Over the years, I

made a lot of Thai friends and joined them on excursions to their home villages where farangs rarely went. I was stared at from doorways, followed by children, and required to greet everyone I met, whether we understood each other or not.

## ***Greetings***

Thai men greet people with a wai and say, “Sawatdee, khrap.” Thai women wai and say, “Sawatdee, kah.” Sawatdee is the customary greeting and *khrap* or *kah* is the respectful conversation tag. The next question varies among “How are you?” “Where are you going?” “Have you eaten, yet?”

When departing, Thais will wai and say, “Sawatdee, khrap (kah),” and sometimes back up a step or two before starting off. Another common departure phrase is, “Chok dee, khrap (kah),” good luck. Always end statements or questions with the respectful modifiers *khrap* or *kah* no matter who you are talking to.

## ***The Wai***

Shaking hands when meeting someone is not the Thai way and most of them fumble uncomfortably with this Western custom.

The traditional Thai greeting is the *wai* and it conveys much more than a handshake. The *wai* signifies respect to the person to whom it is given.

It is made by pressing your hands together and placing your index finger tips on your chin, nose or forehead and bowing your head slightly. Each location marks different degrees of respect. The higher the position of the hands the more respect that is being given.

Knowing when to wai and when to shake hands can be confusing. Sometimes you will meet a

Thai who has lived in the West and as you raise your wai he's extending his hand for a handshake. Then you will switch roles a couple of times and have a laugh when you finally coordinate your greetings.

For the most part you will be better off to use the wai as your greeting, but don't wai maids, service people, or children until they wai you first. A wai is always given first by the person who is lower in the social order. This "class" system may offend expatriates who believe in equality among people but it works here. To ignore this rule will embarrass the person wai'd to. A nod of the head and a smile is sufficient.

Thais naturally take the social measure of people they meet, including expatriates, and it is this factor that determines who wais first. Anyone going into a government office on business will wai the officers first. When you go to an office or company to do business, the person who meets you will wai first since you are the customer.

When someone wais to you, return the gesture since not to do so would be like refusing a handshake, or worse. When someone wais to you first it indicates that the person regards you as superior to them and not to wai in return would be a social snub. There will be times when, for various reasons, you will be unable to return the wai. This is excused as long as you acknowledge the gesture with a greeting, a nod of the head, a smile, or if your hands are full of packages, the lifting of a little finger.

Foreigners should not initiate a wai to those that would be considered occupationally inferior. Don't wai tradesmen, domestic help, waiters or taxi drivers even if you are younger than they, until they wai you first. When you

are paying for service you are the boss and bosses don't wai first.

## ***Mai Pen Rai***

*Mai pen rai* means “it’s okay,” “never mind,” “no problem.” Thais will say it when you thank them for doing you a favor, apologize for stepping on someone’s toes in a crowded bus, spill something on the table, or whine about missing your travel connections. It defuses stressful personal encounters and helps to keep the anxiety level down. But some Westerners may have trouble accepting this easy attitude since they are used to a more emotional response.

Once, while on my way to a business appointment I was stuck in traffic and my impatience showed in my facial expressions and body language while the taxi driver said only, “*Mai pen rai*. We will get there.”

“But you don’t understand,” I said, “I’m late!”

When I showed up at the appointment an hour late, apologizing profusely, the person I met with said, “*Mai pen rai*. You are here now.” I had wasted an hour feeling anxious and frustrated over something I could do nothing about and in the end, didn’t really matter.

After adopting this philosophy for myself I found it very calming in situations that were beyond my control. After all, the options are angry frustration or calm acceptance, which do you want?

## ***Jai Yen***

This literally means “cool heart”, but customarily it means “Keep your cool. Don’t lose your temper.” The chances are that you will rarely have an opportunity to say this to a Thai person,

but you will find it very useful to repeat it to yourself over and over like a mantra when you are becoming angry or impatient at something or someone. This technique has saved me many times from opening mouth and inserting foot, saying something I wish I hadn't. Absolutely nothing positive is accomplished by displays of anger, whether it's a loud tirade or a silent scowl.

No one is perfect and Thais sometimes express their displeasure at situations or people, but for the most part they are self controlled. It is the Middle Way to back off from a confrontation rather than to escalate it. But don't mistake this stance as timidity or servility. Thais can become as angry and resentful as anyone and might take the opportunity to express it covertly. Don't insult or demean the waiter who has control over your food. Revenge is an acceptable ego salve.

Since physical confrontation is the last resort for solving differences or insults, Thais often use warnings as another way to avenge their honor when someone berates or demeans them. I once worked as an advisor for a Swedish tour boat company in Pattaya. The owner, a man in his forties had married a Thai and over a few years became a moderately successful exporter to Europe and owned upscale guest houses in Bangkok and Pattaya. The tour boat company was just being organized and the boat was still on dry land being fitted out. The work went slowly and the owner was getting very impatient.

One day he lost his temper with one of the crew that was working on the boat. The man had come to work drunk and was causing disruptions. After a couple of hours working in the 100 degree heat the owner let him have it with both barrels, western style. "You are a



useless drunkard! Get off the property!”

The man became stone quiet, his face froze into a “nobody talks to me like that” glare. He looked around at his crew on the boat. They avoided his glance. You don’t look directly at a person who has just lost face in front of you. Then he settled his gaze on the owner.

The man looked like a South China Seas pirate. A red cloth tied snugly on his head, his dusky Southern Thai face glistening with sweat, and his red, white and ebony eyes doing their best to laser the life out of the pink Swede who insulted him. Finally he climbed off the boat and left the yard. The next day, the owner received a phone call telling him he had better leave Pattaya. He immediately left for Bangkok and did not return. He had been in the country long enough to take the advice seriously.

Jai yen is the rule of the day. Keep your cool at all times. That’s not to say that you can’t defend yourself when you are physically threatened, but be absolutely certain that you are being threatened, not simply teased, taunted or goaded. Thailand is a place where everything you learned in anger management classes pays off. Here, outward displays of anger are not only unacceptable, they can cost you money.

For a couple of years my wife and I belonged to a yacht club in Chonburi at the head of the Gulf of Thailand, an hour’s bus ride from Bangkok. The bus would drop us off on Sukhumvit Road near Chonburi and from there we took motorcycle taxis to the club where we spent the day. When we departed in the afternoon, the manager, a retired Brit, had his driver take us back to Sukhumvit Road where he would flag down a Bangkok bound bus.

One afternoon, the driver, my wife, and I stood on the shoulder of the road. He was checking the buses as they approached to see their destination signs when a bus pulled onto the shoulder and came to a stop near us. "This one?" I asked him. "No," he said. The front door of the bus opened and a hefty Chinese Thai man got out and walked towards us. He walked straight up to our driver and began talking in very angry tones. That got my attention and I watched as the man raised his voice and stepped towards our driver forcing him to back up. Then the man slapped our driver, berated him some more, then got back on the bus and left.

The shame the driver felt was visible on his face, what was left of it after losing so much in front of us and a bus load of passengers.

The following week we went to the yacht club and were talking with the manager when he said, "Oh, you remember the incident last week when my driver was slapped? Well, the police got the fellow. When my man returned he called the police and reported it. It was a private matter. Anyway, the police radioed ahead and stopped the bus forty miles from here and fined the man 500 baht. The fine for fighting starts at 500 baht, and if my man had hit back, he would have been fined as well. That's the way it is in Thailand."

If you fight with a Thai, the chances are that nearby people will jump on you, regardless of who is right or wrong. In addition, you will pay for the property damage.

## *Patience*

Thais are incredibly patient. They can absorb several hours of waiting in traffic jams, or in a

bus that has broken down in the heat of the day, without a whimper. One time I boarded the train in Bangkok for Chiang Mai. It was due to leave at 3:30pm but because of an accident along the line 20 miles out of the city, it didn't leave until noon the next day.

Men, women, and children lived together in the train, without complaint, many of them on the hard seats in third class. One man I talked with summed up his feelings, "Good thing it happened while we are still in the station where there is plenty to eat and drink." For the most part, your patience will be required in minor matters like waiting for service in a restaurant, or for someone to show up for an appointment.

## *Tolerance*

This is a well developed virtue among the Thais, how else could they accept the multitude of social blunders that are committed by expatriates? Except in situations where a person has offended the monarchy or religion, Thai people excuse all manner of mistakes by assuming that farangs don't know any better.

Farangs on the other hand, are not so quick to grant this pardon. They come from countries where companies are expected to have efficient staff trained to "multi-tasking" and be quick about it. But Thais are not geared like that and resist any attempts to change them. You will need to stretch your limits of tolerance to fit in. Be especially forgiving, but never condescending, over perceived shortcomings of people you come into contact with. Never degrade their efforts to serve you whether the person is an executive of a company or the janitor. Treat everyone with respectful tolerance.

## Cultural Caveats

Until you know a person very well, use the polite form of address, *Kuhn*, when addressing or referring to any adult. For example, “Sawatdee khrap, Khun Wilat.” Good day, Mister Wilat. Use this word when you are referring to a third-person and even when you are speaking English with a Thai. “Sawatdee, khrap, Khun Wilat. Have you seen Khun Oy?” This respectful approach towards Thais will greatly smooth your dealings with every person you meet whether beggars, bar girls or bankers, and they will respect you in turn.

- √ Don't express feelings of affection in public. Touching, hugging, or kissing in public is considered vulgar. Even after a long separation, public meetings between loved ones are made with respectful wais, flower garlands, and small talk in a normal tone.
- √ To signal someone to come to you, a waiter for example, extend your right hand, palm down, and move your fingers up and down.
- √ Don't whistle, clap or yell to signal waiters or other service people. If they are close enough to hear your normal voice call them with the word, “Nong,” and use the “come here” hand signal.
- √ Don't be offended if, after you have done a favor for, or presented a gift to a Thai there is only a slight indication of gratitude.
- √ Don't be too profuse when expressing your gratitude for a favor or gift. A sincere thank you and a respectful wai is enough.
- √ Don't be surprised if your verbal instructions are forgotten or not followed.
- √ Don't be upset when Thais are late for appointments. They would not hold it against you if you were late or didn't show up at all.

- √ Don't expect Thais to share your feelings of urgency towards your problems or situations.
- √ Don't judge actions or customs as wrong because they offend your sensitivities, morals or ethics.
- √ Don't judge Thailand using Bangkok as the rule. Any nation's capitol is the behavioral exception. Accept the best and leave the rest.
- √ Don't believe that every time a Thai answers yes to a question, that they mean yes. Yes can mean no, as well. This is caused by a grammatical mix up in the way a question is framed, as well as the Thai reluctance to say no to a request. Some second guessing will be required to get approximately the correct answer.
- √ Be very respectful when you are in temple grounds, near a statue of Buddha, or any other obviously revered location.
- √ Although the weather is hot and muggy, very few Thais wear shorts or go around shirtless. It's a city, not a resort and nothing marks you as a tourist or a newcomer quicker than the way you dress.
- √ The Thais regard your appearance as an indicator of your class as well as a mark of respect shown to them. If you go to a government office wearing shorts, tee shirt and sandals you will still be served but your casual appearance may be resented.
- √ Thai women dress very modestly and western women will avoid rude experiences if they do the same. Off the shoulder blouses, see through material or other forms of provocative clothing are generally only worn by prostitutes, Thai and Western.

- √ Don't speak in a loud voice unless necessary. It sends signals of displeasure whether or not you intend them.

## ***Body Talk***

Unlike hand shaking, back slapping, shoulder patting, hair tousling, bear hugging Americans, Thais are not a touchy-feely society. Except in emergencies, they don't like to touch or be touched without permission. Even policemen making an arrest will not touch the suspect unless it becomes necessary.

Casual touches between people, especially between men and women, should be made with caution. It may be excused between same sex persons if it is a spontaneous, reflexive action followed by an apology, but it is not so easily forgiven if it occurs between a man and a woman. Thais follow this custom so farangs are the usual offenders, men more often than women. A man who makes advances to a woman by casual touching her is asking for trouble.

## ***The Head***

While Thais may adopt a grin and bear it attitude for accidental body contact, they almost never tolerate their heads being touched without permission.

Don't touch anyone's head for any reason, no matter how young they are. Thais consider the head as the most sacred part of the body and the rules for offending this sensitivity are strictly observed. If there is something on a person's head, say a fallen leaf, you may ask permission to remove it. Otherwise, keep your hands out of their hair.

## *The Feet*

As the head is the most sacred part of the body, the feet are the least and not knowing the rules of body language regarding them can cause you some anxious moments.

Keep your feet flat on the floor when sitting down. It is very disrespectful to accidentally face the soles of your feet, with or without shoes, directly at a person, a religious object or a portrait of the Royal Family. When done on purpose, it means “you are lower than the bottom of my foot,” an extreme insult to a proud Thai. “Do you want to see my foot?” Is the Thai invitation for a fight. A British friend of mine learned about this one harrowing night in Chiang Mai.

“I was in a *samlor* (a three wheeled bicycle taxi used in the provinces), when, at an intersection, a large truck came roaring up towards us from the right side. I was apprehensive that it would not stop in time and extended my leg towards it to indicate ‘slow down.’ At least that’s what it means in Britain.”

“The *samlor* driver saw my action and began pedaling like mad as the truck suddenly turned in behind us, grinding gears and picking up speed. It was late at night so there was no traffic and although the *samlor* driver took many sharp turns into the sois the snarling truck stayed right on our tail, flashing the high beams.”

“I recognized road rage and was relieved when the *samlor* turned into a housing compound, but the truck followed right behind. The *samlor* driver got out and began waiing to the truck driver who left the lights on and the motor running as he got out and strode towards me, shaking his fist and yelling. I didn’t know

whether to stay in the samlor or get out. I couldn't imagine what I had done to make the driver so angry with me. Fortunately, some of the people who lived in the compound heard the commotion and came out to investigate.

"They succeeded in calming the driver and a man told me that I had shown the bottom of my foot to him. How was I to know what it meant?"

Never put your feet on tables, desks, chairs or prop them against the backs of theater seats. Shoes or socks should never be stored overhead. On one train ride, there was a great commotion in my car caused when a European traveler placed his Doc Martin boots in the overhead luggage rack. But while the Thais would not touch the boots they ranted at the conductor until the owner took them down.

## *The Hands*

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Like other Asian countries, Thailand regards the right hand as the acceptable one to use at meals and in social settings. The left hand is the one used for cleaning oneself after using the toilet.

Use only your right hand when receiving or offering gifts. Left handed people are not excused from this custom. Although you might never notice it, there are many left handed people in Thailand who have trained themselves in this custom. In Old Asia, a thief's right hand was cut off as punishment, not only did it slow down his thieving but also excluded him from the community rice bowl where people ate with their hands, right hands only.

When receiving or presenting something with an elderly person or one of senior or official status, use your right hand and place your left



hand in a supporting position under your right forearm. Even in less esteemed situations, say a shopkeeper is handing you your purchases, he will often give you the package in this manner. This action conveys thanks and respect. When someone is handing you something, accept it gracefully, never snatch something out of another person's hand.

Don't point your finger at anyone, especially in anger. Use broad, hand motions to indicate a person.

### ***The Body***

Never step over any part of another person. This can become a test of diplomacy and balance on a train where sleeping people extend their legs into the aisles.

It is considered disrespectful even to walk over animals as I found out when I stepped over a dog sleeping on the sidewalk and the Thai people nearby moaned collectively and looked at me in alarm.

### ***In Thai Homes***

No matter how regal or humble it is, a Thai's home is his palace and certain customs are always observed. Remove your shoes before entering a house or apartment. Like all Asians, Thais have adopted the practice of not wearing shoes in the house. This is a health custom since Thais sit, sleep and even eat on the floor. In rural areas it is even more important since people work on farms where dirt borne diseases are always a problem. If you don't want to leave your Guccis outside the door ask your host if you may have some paper to place them on inside. Even if your friend says it is okay to wear your shoes in the house, don't do it. This is one time when "yes" means "no." In Burma,

Thailand's neighbor, "no" means "no" as the British found out after they annexed the country. In 1824 the relations between Britain and Burma boiled over in the Second Anglo-Burmese War called "The Shoe Question," caused by the British refusal to remove their shoes when entering a house.

- √ Don't step on the threshold. This is the bottom section of the door frame. Step over it. This rule applies to all door frames. For me, the "no shoes" rule was easier to remember and I violated this one a number of times before it was committed to memory.
- √ Sit where you are told. Your host will indicate where you are to sit, and this becomes your place during the visit. Always return to it.
- √ Don't wander around the house or presume to know where the toilet is and go looking for it on your own. Ask your host if you may use the toilet and he will show you the way.
- √ Don't wear all black or all white clothing, these are colors for funerals. Although your hosts will not say anything if you do, they may give you some questioning looks, wondering who died.

## *In The Workplace*

Thai customs are vital for workplace harmony and equally important to understand are the Thai attitudes concerning co-worker relationships.

For many Westerners, some of these attitudes are in direct opposition to their training, experience, or management style. Some expatriates adapt quickly to the Thai ways. Others take more time. But, eventually they all discover the Thai ways of working together.

## *Sanook*

For Thais, a workplace must have an attitude of *sanook* (enjoyment, fun) or they quit. They don't go to the boss and complain. They simply come up with an excuse and quit. The job was no longer *sanook*. It may be their problem. Perhaps they will never find jobs they like. But if several employees quit in a relatively short period, it's probably because the workplace is *mai sanook* (not fun).

- √ When you are working with Thais try to maintain an upbeat attitude, or at least, the appearance of one. Thais are automatic smilers and to not return a smile is seen as a signal of displeasure. It doesn't need to be big, a slight grin and a nod of the head will do.
- √ If you have problems with a co-worker, employee, or supervisor do not lose your temper or directly confront them in front of other staff members. To do so would cause the person to lose face. Keep your differences private and polite.
- √ Never say, "If I can do it, so can you."
- √ Don't hold meetings on Saturdays.
- √ Don't be a timekeeping tyrant. If a meeting is delayed because a person is late, let it pass without comment.
- √ Memorize the names of your co workers.
- √ Make every effort to communicate clearly. Nothing breaks the *sanook* feeling quicker or more thoroughly than confusing instructions.

# *Festivals*

There are dozens of festivals in Thailand every year but the most remarkable thing about living here is that you get three new years: the Western New Year in January, Chinese New Year in February, and the Thai New Year in April.

Thais take any holiday they can get and the January New Year is celebrated pretty much the same as in Western countries.

The Chinese New Year is celebrated in a more sedate manner as Chinese merchants close their shops for a week and family gatherings are held in homes.

Until 1940, Thailand's calendar year began on April 13 then it was changed to January first for the convenience of agreement with Western nations. Even so, the original New Year's celebration is still a major holiday season called Songkran, The Water Festival.

This is the hottest time of the year and a water festival is fitting. The festival goes on for several days and the major activity of this occasion involves people pouring, squirting, or throwing water on each other. The origins of this custom are not clear, and sometimes even the purpose of this festival become a bit misty.

The first one I experienced was at Chiang Mai in 1980. I was teaching English in the afternoons and rode a bicycle to the school. On the way I saw three young boys peeking around a fence at me as I approached them. As I pedaled slowly past them they ambushed me with buckets of water. I must admit, jai yen was not my first thought but I didn't go back, after all, they had more water on hand. I caught a few more soakings on the way and arrived at class dripping wet. But I wasn't alone, everyone was soaked. I asked the students, "What's with the water throwing?" I got several replies and the consensus was, "Because it is hot."

The next day, I packed clothes and books into plastic bags and wore only shorts and a tee shirt. I

didn't try to dodge the water and even found a Chinese shop owner who had an oil drum full of water and a couple of blocks of ice to chill it down. There, I stopped alongside and let him pour water on me. There is nothing like a cold shower on a hot afternoon. Later I passed two elderly Thai men standing along the road. One held a shiny, metal bowl of water with flower blossoms floating on top, the other man held a small branch covered in leaves.

I stopped to see what they were doing and the man with the branch dipped it into the bowl of water then gently sprinkled me and said, "Sawatdee pee mai," happy New Year. We began talking and I asked him about the meaning of the sprinkling.

"This is the way it was in the old times," he said, "Songkran was a time to forgive all of the animosity and resentments of the past year and the water symbolized the washing away of those feelings. In those days everyone traveled slowly, walking or riding in a buffalo cart, and they would stop to have water sprinkled on them. It was refreshing. But now, everyone has faster transportation and the people must throw the water."

In reality, it is a playful, no sides, every person for themselves water fight in which the whole population takes part. If you do not want to play, stay indoors until nightfall when a temporary truce is declared. Windowless buses are a favorite target, especially when stopped for a traffic light. Be prepared to get wet just about anywhere you go this includes offices where a smiling receptionist will pour water on your shoulder. To make sure that everyone is forgiven, pickup trucks loaded with drums of water and a crew of water throwers prowl the streets, splashing everyone in sight, including, motorcycle riders and pedestrians.

If you want to join in, arm yourself with a water gun, they are on sale everywhere, and squirt some people. If you are taking the game seriously, quit playing. This is a time to get rid of hard feelings, not get them.



## *Income Opportunities*

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Like any large city in the world Bangkok has income and job opportunities and as a foreigner you can work for a company or start up your own, but you will have to jump through some bureaucratic hoops to do so.

The regulations for starting a business or working in Thailand are clear and not difficult to meet. Many expatriates have done so successfully but you will have to jump through some bureaucratic hoops to do so.

The Thai government has a specific list of jobs and professions that are available only for Thai citizens but there are other positions that are best filled by an English speaking foreigner. As a general rule, an international or Thai company that requires English speaking personnel would rather hire someone who is already in the country than take someone, sight unseen, from overseas.

## *Where To Look*

The classified sections of the English language newspapers always list job openings for foreigners. The positions offered are for technically skilled, experienced personnel and cover many fields. But a little reading between the lines is helpful since some companies are willing to take on a person who may not exactly fill their requirements but fits most of them well enough to suit the needs of the company.

A friend of mine who had trained as a secretary and knew a few computer programs answered an ad in the Bangkok Post and scored the position of assistant editor for an English language travel magazine. Although she had no formal training as an editor, she was quick to learn and worked there for several years.

Another acquaintance who was computer literate and a quick learner replied to an ad in the Bangkok Post and was hired as the publications manager of a new cable TV station. This job included publishing the TV guide in English and the promotional publications used for the Miss Universe event hosted by the station.

Though positions are offered to foreigners in the newspapers, these are only a few of the opportunities available. There are scores of international companies looking for English speaking personnel but don't openly advertise for them. Instead they make a formal request to their company's Human Resources Department, and informally let the word out to the expatriate community.

## *Networking*

Networking is the key to making a living in Bangkok. You have got to have friends and the expatriate social clubs are an excellent way to make

them. For example, the Bangkok Community Theater is notified when extras are needed for movies or commercials being filmed in the kingdom. I scored two jobs this way. Teaching English is another effective way to build a network of friends who pass the word about companies looking to hire expatriates.

## *Teaching English*

If you own a suit and tie, and hold a bachelor's degree in any subject you'll find plenty of English teaching jobs in Bangkok.

Some schools will accept you if you have completed a certification course of study for Teaching English as a Foreign Language. English teachers need not be native speakers but Americans, Canadians, New Zealanders, Australians and British citizens are preferred.

The schools provide the course materials and test the students for their level of understanding before they are admitted into the class. The classes are men and women of various ages, except for one class of monks I had where women were not allowed into the room.

The rate of pay for teachers varies depending on your qualifications and the school's pay policy. Many of the schools provide work permits. Visit the websites listed below for more details.

Besides language schools there are companies that provide teachers for home study. This is generally limited to the Japanese and Korean expatriate communities, usually executive's families of companies operating in Thailand. Their children attend an international school where English is the language and the kids must get up to speed quickly in order to



attend. One friend of mine taught Japanese kids using Sesame Street books. The pay was US\$15 per hour.

For interviews, make a one page resume with a passport photo attached. List only relevant work history and education. Include a passport sized photo in the top corner and a cell phone number where you can be reached. Then present copies to the schools you are interested in working for. You will have a job within a week.

Although work permits are required, many teachers are employed without one there is little risk that a school will be raided but problems can arise if you get into trouble with the police or Immigration authorities and you are required to prove how you have supported yourself while living in the kingdom.

Your first job might be only a couple of classes a week but the schools always have a turnover of teachers and if you suit up and show up you will be called on to fill in when other teachers have to miss classes or quit in the middle of a course.

### ***Government Calls for Teachers***

On May 23, 2005, the Education Ministry announced its intention to recruit 10,000 native English speakers to teach primary school students at government schools nationwide.

Advertisements will be posted on the ministry's website and Thai embassies will assist in selecting candidates. Applicants must at least hold a bachelor's degree.

The Education Ministry offers a one-year contract and free accommodation. The positions open for expatriate teachers are in upcountry schools with less than 200 students.

## ***Websites For Teaching Jobs***

A web browser search for English language schools in Bangkok will provide many listings. Below are some that will get you started.

### **TEFL.NET**

[www.tefl.net](http://www.tefl.net)

If you have TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certification the range of job opportunities available to you broadens and the pay is better. Visit this site for more information.

### **Ajarn.com**

[www.ajarn.com](http://www.ajarn.com)

One of the best sources on teaching in Thailand. This site includes everything you need to know.

### **Dave's ESL Cafe**

A long established site with useful links and information

Website: [www.daveseslcafe.com](http://www.daveseslcafe.com)

### **Thailand Teacher**

E-mail: [admin@thailandteacher.com](mailto:admin@thailandteacher.com)

Website: [www.thailandteacher.com/schooldir.asp](http://www.thailandteacher.com/schooldir.asp)

## ***English Language Schools***

There are dozens of language schools in the city. Their pay rates and requirements vary from one to the other.

### **American University Alumnae (A.U.A.)**

179 Rajadamri Rd.

Tel.: 02 252 8170 Ext. 3201

Fax: 02 252 8398

E-mail: [info@auathai.com](mailto:info@auathai.com)  
Website: [www.auathailand.org](http://www.auathailand.org)

This school is very popular with students and teachers. Check the website for details.

### **British American**

Soi 58 60 Lad Prao Rd.  
Tel.: 02 734 1791  
E-mail; [british\\_american2000@hotmail.com](mailto:british_american2000@hotmail.com)  
Website: [www.british-american.ac.th](http://www.british-american.ac.th)

A large organization with many branches. Visit the website for openings and teacher requirements.

### **Siam Computer & Language Institute**

73-75 Old Petchakaseam Rd.  
Klongkrachang, Petchburi 76000 Thailand  
Tel.: 032-401218-9 Fax: 032-401218  
E-mail: [siampetc@bkk4.loxinfo.co.th](mailto:siampetc@bkk4.loxinfo.co.th)  
Website: <http://siampetch.tripod.com/>

This institute has 35 schools in Greater Bangkok. It is always hiring teachers.

### **Ajarn.com**

Website: [www.ajarn.com](http://www.ajarn.com)  
Ant all-purpose job board for Thailand.

### **Dave's ESL Cafe**

Website: [www.daveseslcafe.com](http://www.daveseslcafe.com).  
The international job board, which often carries Thailand job postings.

### **ECC (Thailand):**

Website: [www.eccthai.com](http://www.eccthai.com).

A well established school. ECC offers a one month TEFL certificate course.

### **Inlingua (Thailand)**

Website: [www.inlinguathailand.com](http://www.inlinguathailand.com).

Another reputable chain with several branches.

### **English Plus (Thailand)**

Website: [www.eltcom.com](http://www.eltcom.com)

Yet another chain with multiple branches.

### **The British Council (Thailand)**

Website: [www.britishcouncil.or.th](http://www.britishcouncil.or.th)

Located at Siam Square.

### **Thammasat University**

Website: [www.tu.ac.th/org/litu/](http://www.tu.ac.th/org/litu/)

One of the top universities in Thailand.

### **Chulalongkorn University**

Website: [www.culi.chula.ac.th](http://www.culi.chula.ac.th).

Located in the heart of the city behind Siam Square.

### **Bangkok University**

Website: [www.bu.ac.th/english](http://www.bu.ac.th/english).

Another reputable university in Bangkok.

## ***Questions for The Schools***

All schools are not equal so be sure to ask the following questions of each potential employer:

- √ How many hours a week will you teach?
- √ Will they sponsor a work visa? (They should).
- √ Will they help find an apartment? (They should).
- √ How much do they pay? (300 Baht an hour is minimum).
- √ If possible, talk to other teachers at the school and confirm that they are treated well and paid on time.

## *Literary Skills*

Many of the English language publishing companies require an English speaking writer or editor on the staff at one time or another. The openings include full time, part time, or contract positions.

I once contracted to work on a series of directories that were being produced for the foreign Chambers of Commerce in Bangkok. It was straight copy typing and I was paid according to the amount of work I produced. Although speed typing a catalog of names and phone numbers is not my favorite work, it wasn't terminal and only lasted a month. But while I was there I met other expatriates, free-lance writers, and we exchanged information on work opportunities. One fellow turned me on to a copy writing job with an ad agency where I received several assignments.

## *Exporting*

If you like the marketing game then exporting Thai products may be for you. For a few years I exported paintings, lacquer ware, hand painted umbrellas and fans to the US where I had a partner who sold them at Saturday markets. The process was simple. Buy the products, and consign them to a shipper who took care of the paperwork and shipping arrangements. There is no duty on Thai handicrafts into the US and the shipping was straightforward. I kept the money value of the shipment at a level that qualified for a "non commercial, samples" status.

Shipping to the US by sea takes one to two months. Sea freight charges are based on a minimum charge for one cubic meter, and depend on the customs classification of the shipment. For example, one cubic meter held 300, 20" paper umbrellas. If I classified them as umbrellas the cost was US\$120. If I listed the shipment as "bamboo ware" the cost was US\$60.

Air freight is economical for light weight shipments and small objects. The air freight calculations are based on a minimum, weight/size ratio. That means you buy x amount of space and in that space you can put x amount of weight. Quite often, when shipping large, light weight objects, the space dimensions are the determining factor, so you can add to the shipment until you have reached your space/weight limits. This spreads the cost of the shipment. Inquire at the express shipping companies like DHL and Fedex for shipping rates.

If you are new to the game, make yourself aware of the export and import regulations of the countries involved. For example, find out if there are any restrictions on the products that you wish to export. Libraries and bookstores stock numerous books on importing and exporting.

## *Going Into Business*

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Thailand and America have joined in a Treaty of Amity and Economic Relations which is very favorable to Americans who start businesses in the kingdom. Details of the treaty can be found at American Chamber of Commerce in Thailand.

You may come up with ideas and methods for establishing a business in the kingdom and although the process in most cases is not all that difficult, it will take time. A lot depends on the nature of the business, manufacturing, service, or sales.

An expatriate I knew started an office cleaning business in Bangkok. He managed it very efficiently and ended up selling it for a handsome amount of money and was then hired on to manage the company.

A couple of other acquaintances, a Canadian and an American, opened a construction consulting business.

Another fellow, a recording technician from New York, arrived in the city a few years ago armed only

with his skill. He started a recording business from scratch that is now very successful. When he arrived he looked for opportunity, not a job. He studied Thai, got into the music scene where he made friends with musicians and recording producers then sold his idea to a Thai partner.

One American entrepreneur published The Trading Post, an English language shoppers' newspaper. He sold ads to restaurants, supermarkets, tailors, sports bars as well as classified ads from expatriates. It was distributed in the Bangkok tourist and expatriate areas in grocery stores, beauty shops, restaurants and other places frequented by expatriates. Another expatriate began a business supplying custom made, inlaid picture frames to buyers in the US and Europe. Another expatriate started a peanut butter manufacturing company. Still another initiated an all inclusive golf tour of the country which he marketed in the US, Japan and Europe.

Thailand is a model of free enterprise where entrepreneurs can formulate ideas, test them out, and put them into full operation within a reasonable amount of time and the government regulations for Americans in business are more encouraging than negative. But regulations are subject to change and it is a good idea to consult with the organizations listed below for current information.

### **The American Chamber of Commerce Thailand**

Kian Gwan Bldg. 2, 18th Flr.  
140/1 Wireless Rd.  
Lumpini, Pathumwan, Bangkok 10330  
Tel.: 02 251 9266  
Fax: 02 651 4472  
E-mail: [service@amchamthailand.com](mailto:service@amchamthailand.com)  
Website: [www.amchamThailand.org](http://www.amchamThailand.org)

## **U.S. Commercial Service**

Diethelm Tower A, Suite 302  
93/1 Wireless Rd.  
Bangkok 10330  
Tel.: 02 205 5090  
E-mail: [bangkok.office.box@mail.doc.gov](mailto:bangkok.office.box@mail.doc.gov)  
Website: [www.buyusa.gov/thailand/en/](http://www.buyusa.gov/thailand/en/)  
Office Hours: 7am to 4pm

The Service offers business assistance to U.S. firms in Thailand, whether new or established. The services include helping companies to assess the market as well as identify and pre-qualify potential agents and distributors. Market research is published indicating prospective sectors and emerging opportunities for American suppliers of equipment, products and services in a variety of industries.

## **Siam International Legal Group**

45 Sukhumvit Rd. Soi 24  
Klongtoey, Bangkok 10110  
Skytrain Station: Phrom Phong Exit 4  
Tel: 02 661 1362  
*E-mail:* [info@siam-legal.com](mailto:info@siam-legal.com)  
Website: [www.siam-legal.com](http://www.siam-legal.com)

This company has a good reputation among expats who have used its services. It offers legal assistance in all forms of mergers, purchases or franchises. Visit the website for details.



## **Sunbelt Asia Co., Ltd**

Fortune Town 26th Flr.  
1 Ratchada Phisek Rd.  
Bangkok, Thailand  
Tel: 02 642 0213-18  
E-mail: [legal@sunbeltasia.com](mailto:legal@sunbeltasia.com)  
Website: [www.lawyer.th.com](http://www.lawyer.th.com)

This American managed company acts as a Business Transaction Intermediary specializing in international mergers, acquisitions and franchises looking to expand to Asia, as well as local Thai firms. Visit the website for details.

## *Expatriate Experiences*



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### *The Smuggler's Slowcoach*

"I'd like a second-class ticket to Butterworth, please."

The agent behind the counter at the Hat Yai train station, glanced up at me, shook his head and said, "Today, the train is third-class, only. The International Express comes tomorrow. Maybe it will have second-class."

"I'll take third-class, then," I said.

My visa expired that day and I needed to be out of the country. So, I was making my first Visa Run from Bangkok to the Thai Consulate in Penang, Malaysia.

I wanted to take the International Express, a modern, air-conditioned train that made the trip straight through from Bangkok to Butterworth but in 1981 it traveled only two days a week and I was unable to book a seat so I took an overnight train to Had Yai

where I had to board another train to Butterworth.

“The train leaves in thirty minutes,” the ticket agent said.

Since there was no train at the platform I asked him, “Where is the train?”

He waved his arm in the direction of the train yard where a string of four connected cars stood baking in the sun, “That one.”

The “train” was simply self-propelled railcars coupled together. Even from a distance it was plain that they were well past their retirement age. A patina of dust and grime coated the faded blue and yellow sides. The dull, silver paint on the roof was sutured with crooked lines of black caulking tracing where countless leaks had been patched.

The boarding steps were located at the ends of the cars. The windows and doors were wide open, allowing the heat and dust to circulate.

Inside, passengers struggled to find room for their bodies and booty. The seats were all taken when I boarded so I squeezed in along the side, sat on my pack and observed my fellow travellers. Two, young European couples stood across from me, nervously guarding backpacks the size of Volkswagens. Like tourists everywhere, they were trying to “get away from it all” while bringing most of “it” with them. The rest of the passengers were Southern Thais or Malays; and colorful batik sarongs and pasins mixed with the earth tones of Muslim shawls and the dark blue of Thai farmer’s clothing.

Voices competed for attention as the passengers shouted greetings and gossiped with each other, joyous as a bunch of compulsive shoppers returning from a binge at the mall. One enterprising Thai woman, obviously a regular passenger, sat on the small, baggage shelf at the end of the car and set up a refreshment stand, selling cigarettes at two for one baht, chewing gum by the stick, candy by the piece,

and warm, soft drinks. She did a brisk business but folded her operation when the train left the station, by then the car was so full that there wasn't room for the luxury of a snack bar.

These border-crossers were serious shoppers. Large sacks of rice lay in the aisle. Stacks of packaged foods were everywhere and the overhead luggage racks were stuffed with commercial quantities of toiletries. I thought to myself, "a case of toothpaste? A gross of disposable razors? A dozen-pack of talcum powder? This stuff can't be contraband.

The first test came five minutes from the station when the train stopped to pick up the Thai Customs officers. It got underway again as they began their inspection.

A crisply uniformed, stone faced officer entered the car and questioned the passengers about the contents of the bags and boxes. He stopped occasionally to write on a clipboard he carried, then casually pointed his pen at a sack of rice and said, "Whose is this?"

A middle-aged Thai woman timidly raised her hand. When the officer began questioning her she appeared confused and embarrassed, then said that although it was "illegal" rice, it was meant for her family, not for resale as the officers might think. She started out with low-voiced entreaties and built to a crescendo bursting with tearful pleadings. He listened to her for a couple of minutes but remained impassive. Finally, amid her yelps of protest, he put his clipboard down and dragged the bag to the door. A few minutes later, the train stopped and the inspectors departed taking the confiscated goods to waiting trucks. As the train pulled away, the woman's sobs changed abruptly to giggles as she and an accomplice dragged another bag of rice out from under a seat and stowed it under removable floorboards.

The other passengers also swung into action and began stowing their cargoes into well established

hiding places.

Looking down the aisle I could see the people in the other cars busily doing the same thing. Cartons were opened and their contents were stashed into every available enclosure, niche, recess, nook and compartment in the train. A young man carrying boxes of cookies, candies, disposable razors and clutching a screwdriver went into the water closet. He emerged a few minutes later, twirling the screwdriver. I glanced into the W.C. — no smuggled goods in there. Then he pulled the floorboards up and loaded sacks of rice into the empty battery compartments. Wooden panels were removed and goods packed inside and panels replaced. Even the thin seat backs provided concealments. This high-speed activity resembled a stage play with the curtain down and the actors urgently setting the scene for the next act — The Border.

Since it traveled very slowly to allow the smugglers time, the train practically coasted to a stop at the Padang Besar border station. Perhaps stealth was part of its deception.

Here the train waited for an hour while Immigration officials scrutinized passports and Malaysian Customs men inspected the train. There were some minor disputes over the tax status of some of the “baggage” but this troupe of greymarket entrepreneurs were quick to ad-lib the situations and played a skillful game of Win Some, Lose Some. The Slowcoach finally entered Malaysia and attained its highball speed of 15 m.p.h.

In contrast to the lethargy of the train, the smugglers were busier than a team of one-armed paperhangers. They retrieved their illicit cargo from its hiding places and began filling cardboard boxes with assortments of merchandise. The Chief of the operation was a husky Thai-Malay-Chinese woman in her thirties who went through the cars accompanied by her aide-de-camp, Mr. Screwdriver. She checked the

contents of each box with a list she carried and sent Mr. Screwdriver to get more tubes of toothpaste, rice crispy cakes or whatever else was needed to fill the order. The packing frenzy finally ebbed and the cartons were placed near the doors. The smuggling crew, mostly teen aged boys and girls, dozed wherever they could find room. Some played cards on the baggage shelf. Others gathered around the doors to smoke and flirt. As we click-clacked leisurely into Malaysia, amber sunlight slanted through the windows and basted everyone with perspiration while illuminating the millions of homeless dust motes that floated through the train.

The Chief didn't rest but strolled through the train inspecting the shipment preparations. Then she pushed her way to an open window and leaned out, her red head scarf fluttering in the wind, her narrowed eyes searching the landscape ahead. Suddenly, she ducked inside and gave an order. The card players abandoned their game and moved quickly to their action stations forming delivery teams. Mr. Screwdriver stood on the boarding steps. Behind him stood two boys and a girl each holding sealed cartons. Still leaning out the window, The Chief gave another command and Mr. Screwdriver lobbed a carton into the tall grass beside the tracks. A man popped up, recovered the box and scooted off on a motorbike. Another command; another box launched into the grass; another man and motorcycle. Another. And another.

All the passengers watched the operation and cheered loudly at each delivery. The Chief basked in the attention and assumed the serious demeanor of a rebel Cargo Mistress dropping supplies to a village besieged by unfair tariffs.

Afterwards, the smugglers reveled in their popularity while the passengers were equally excited by this interesting diversion and the mood turned festive. Everyone shared tobacco, jokes and the occasional bottle of whiskey that made the rounds. At one point, a tipsy, one-legged man stood up with

his crutch and dramatically related how he lost the other one in a war. Then, as if to show that it didn't matter, he broke into a song-and-dance routine, a sprightly one-step with a crutch while his equally tipsy friend accompanied him with a harmonica. It was a class act and the onlookers applauded and joked with him as he cadged cigarettes from the crowd.

There were several more drops that afternoon, but each time there were fewer people to celebrate with as passengers got off and no new ones got on. At dusk, the train crept through the outskirts of Butterworth so slowly that people jumped off as we neared their homes. The half-dozen farang, visa runners had the train all to themselves as it pulled into the station. No smugglers here.



## *Sea Trekking in Thailand*

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Hurled by wind and wave, the catamaran *Sea Traders* charged southwards along the western shore of the Gulf of Thailand. Five miles away, the port of Chumpon hid under a thick monsoon haze, its location validated by a score of shrimp trawlers aiming at its entrance, their dry-stack, diesel engines bellowing as they raced towards shelter, hoping to beat the approaching storm.

It was late afternoon and the north wind that greeted the day in Prachuap Khiri Khan 100 miles north as little more than a zephyr, now blew at 25 knots. In this playful mood, it rolled legions of waves across the Gulf, then pumped them up to eight-feet in the shoal water off of Chumpon.

But while the trawlers buried their noses and rolled on their ears, our 35' Polynesian catamaran



thrived on the conditions and flew over the sea like a twin-hulled windsurfer. For the crew of *Sea Traders*, it was our reason for being there.

A couple of months before, Bianca, Peter and I worked as English teachers in landlocked Northern Thailand. Then, on a visa-run holiday I discovered a 35' catamaran for sale in Pattaya, a seaside resort on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Thailand. It had been slightly damaged when it drifted off its anchorage during a storm and collided with the seawall. The owner, a Thai windsurfing champion, didn't want it anymore and offered it to me for \$2000. I called Peter and Bianca on the phone and we agreed to buy the boat.

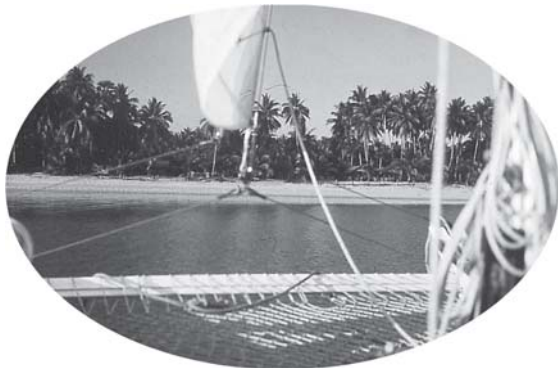
We quit our jobs and moved to Pattaya where we spent the next six weeks preparing for a sea trek in the Gulf of Thailand. While Bianca and I had previously worked as cruising yacht sailors, Peter had never sailed before but was a quick learner. He spoke excellent Thai and while on his "missions from the boat" he collected a covey of girlfriends. Bianca and I nicknamed him, "Sailbad the Sinner."

When the repairs were completed, we christened the boat *Sea Traders* and departed Pattaya on the evening tide. The course was due west across the gulf on the first leg of the voyage to Ko Samui, a resort island in Southern Thailand.

We gained our sea legs on a smooth crossing and the next evening anchored along the western shore between the towns of Hua Hin and Prachuap Khiri Khan. The next day we sailed into the harbor at Prachuap Khiri Khan and anchored among the shrimp trawlers. A little while later a Thai Customs boat pulled alongside and two officers came on board to inspect our boat. This port gets a lot of smuggler traffic since it is only a few miles from the border with Burma. When they finished we gathered on the deck for a cup of coffee. They both spoke English and we chatted for a few minutes before one of them

said, "Where's the motor?" Sailbad reached down to the deck and picked up an oar, "Here's one of them," The officers had a hard time believing that we would not have a motor for such a large boat. The fact was that the "Armstrong Outboards," two oars, could easily move the boat in a calm sea, and who needs a motor when there's wind?

*Sea Traders* departed Prachuap Khiri Khan the next morning with just enough breeze to clear the harbor. We headed south, ghosting along the coast five miles offshore. By noon the wind had increased and was pushing the boat along at 8 knots. Two hours later we were doing 12 to 15 knots with the wind and waves at our back. Cloud masses rising in the east told us that act two of a three-act storm coming. We had to find shelter, quickly.



Chumpon Harbor was out. We could have made it there easily. Just follow the trawlers, but once inside the harbor it's every captain for himself and collisions are not uncommon. We learned that from a near miss the night before in Prachuap Khiri Khan when we had to fend off a trawler that was dragging its anchor through the anchorage. About seven miles south of Chumpon is Ao Sawi, a sheltered bay with a small cove nestled in the northeast corner that offered a protected anchorage. We set our new course and, sailsurfing at 15 knots, showed our rooster tails to the fishing fleet as *Sea Traders* threaded her way through the maze of offshore islands to the entrance of Ao Sawi. There we skidded the boat through a ninety-degree turn and into the calm waters of the

bay. The cove was easy to find and had only three, anchored trawlers.

The scene was vintage Thailand. Craggy, jungle covered ridges formed a majestic windbreak where birds of prey circled on the thermals. The narrow coastal plain was a forest of coco-palms punctuated by a thin column of white smoke. A few canoes lay beached on the thin crescent of beige sand. We anchored close to shore, completely protected from the storm in the Gulf.

“We might be here for a few days,” I said, “I wonder what the people are like?”

“We’ll know in a few minutes.” Bianca said, “here come a couple of them now.”

A dugout canoe glided towards us powered by twin “Armstrong” outboards — an old man and a young boy paddling in unison. As they came alongside, the old man held up a fish and said something in Thai.

“He wants to know if we want to buy some fish,” Sailbad said.

“Maybe he just want’s to check us out. It’s his neighborhood,” I said, “Ask him to come aboard.”

I tied off the canoe while Sailbad helped them up on deck. Bianca served them a glass of water — the customary Thai icebreaker — and with Sailbad as interpreter, we had a fairly understood conversation with them. The old man was the boy’s grandfather, so we called him Phuu. He wore faded, blue shorts and a stained, tee shirt with a Singha Beer logo. His craggy face with its quick, toothless smile and mahogany colored skin told of a lifetime on the water as did his thin build and ropy muscles — no overweight, out of shape people in his game. He explained that he collected bird’s nests, the ones used to make Chinese soup, but couldn’t get to his island base because of the weather, so he went fishing instead.

He was very interested in our boat so we showed him around. At one point he asked, “Where is the

engine?" When I said we didn't have one I couldn't tell if he was impressed or thought us fools. Either way, when I invited him to go sailing the next day, his smile told me that he hoped I would ask.

Phuu and the boy came out to the boat the next morning and we set sail to investigate Sawi Bay. Although the wind still churned up the Gulf, here the water was flat, with just enough breeze wafting over the hills to push us along at five knots. Phuu was as eager to learn about sailing as we were to discover the secrets of Sawi and it wasn't long before he was steering the catamaran. He called *Sea Traders* an "old man's boat" because it was so stable and easy to move around on. But he upgraded his definition when a rainsquall hit us and the boat quickly accelerated across the calm water.

We explored the Sawi coast, venturing into places we would not have dared without Phuu's guidance. That evening, we went to Phuu's house in the coconut grove and took freshwater baths from the klong jars, ate rice curry and passed the hours sharing sea-stories, tobacco, and friendship around the glow of a hissing pressure lantern. Phuu predicted clearing weather for the next day and added that he was going to his island in the morning. Would we care to go with him? You bet.

The wind in the Gulf died down overnight and the next morning we loaded Phuu's supplies on board and, towing his canoe, set off for the bird nest island, a small lump on the horizon five miles to the southeast. As we approached, the island's steep sides appeared impenetrable but Phuu guided us to a narrow passage between rocky outcrops that led into a protected lagoon where we beached the boat and tied it to a palm tree.

Phuu, who had been studying the island intently as we approached, now became a man of action. He unrolled a blanket that was stowed in his canoe and picked up a single barrel shotgun.

I asked, "What's that for? Hunting birds in the cave?" I tried to make a joke.

Sailbad translated the question and Phuu replied, "Kamoy."

"Thieves," Sailbad said, "He wants us to go with him."

With the price of bird's nests at several hundred dollars a pound, poachers were a constant threat.

We followed Phuu into the jungle and began ascending a ridge, at the top we rested under a small lean-to. This was Phuu's lookout post and its location gave a panoramic view of the island and especially the bird nest grottoes on the north end. He scanned the view thoroughly and then led us down the trail to the caves near the shore where the birds roosted. In one cavern he demonstrated his agility by clambering up rickety, bamboo scaffolding to inspect his unusual treasure. Everything seemed in order so he led us back to the boat where we unloaded his canoe and supplies.

We fixed lunch at Phuu's island house, actually a palm frond and split-bamboo bungalow furnished with a sleeping platform and a low table. He invited us to stay as long as we wished and we did. After three lazy days of exploring the ridge and snorkeling in the lagoon, it was time to leave. Phuu stood on the shore and waived as we sailed out of the lagoon.

I looked at the simple hut, nestled in its idyllic jungle setting, secluded from the world, yet charged with the possibility of adventure. I know people who would pay for a few days of life like this. In fact, thousands of vacationers each year attempt to do so on the island of Ko Samui, our next landfall.

## Contact the Author

*Robert Hein*  
*roberthein@biancahein.com*

*Mailing address:*  
*34/38 M3*  
*Na Jomtien Soi 17*  
*Sukhumvit*  
*3T Na Jomtien*  
*Sattahip, Chonburi 20250*  
*THAILAND*

*Tel: 038-237-716*

*We hope you have enjoyed the book.*

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