

Frequently Asked Questions



Kingdom of Thailand

The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions and answers to some frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip.



Bangkok ~ Elevation: 66 feet / Latitude: 13 44N / Longitude: 100 34E

Average Temperature

°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	80	83	85	87	86	85	85	84	84	83	81	79

Average Precipitation

in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	0.4	1.1	1.2	2.8	7.5	6	6.2	7.4	12.6	9.1	2.3	0.4

Chiang Mai ~ Elevation: 1030 feet / Latitude: 18 47N / Longitude: 098 59E

Average Temperature

°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	71	75	81	85	84	83	82	82	81	80	76	71

Average Precipitation

in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	0.3	0.2	0.6	1.8	6	5.3	6.6	8.9	9.9	5.2	1.7	0.6

Phuket ~ Elevation: 33 feet / Latitude: 08 07N / Longitude: 098 19E

Average Temperature

°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	81	82	83	84	83	83	82	83	81	81	81	81

Average Precipitation

in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	1.4	1.2	1.5	6.4	13.7	8.4	10.4	10.3	16.5	12	8.2	2

WEATHER

Tropical Thailand is tropical climate, and is normally hot and humid. Understanding the seasonal variations, however, can help in planning a visit. Three main seasons provide a distinct, and fairly predictable, set of climate changes. March to June is the hottest period. Visitors are advised to seek shade, take advantage of air conditioners, and stay out of the midday sun.

July to November is the rainy season. It is slightly cooler although still hot by most standards, and much wetter. Tourists favor December to February the most. The weather then is still hot, but not nearly as humid. But in northern Thailand, temperatures can drop to less than 10 degrees Centigrade at night while its southern isthmus remains hot and humid year round.

TIME ZONES / TRAVELING TIME

Thailand is seven hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT +7:00). Depending on season, Bangkok is 12 hours ahead of New York, and 15 hours ahead of Los Angeles. Thailand does not observe Daylight Savings Time. Flight time to Bangkok is approximately 17 hours from Los Angeles and 20 hours from New York City.

PASSPORTS & VISAS

Passports: For international travel, a U.S. passport valid for at least six months from date of departure, containing **at least** two blank pages is necessary.

Visas: U.S. and Canadian citizens do not require visas in advance. Citizens from other countries, consult the nearest Thailand consulate.

Important: Please look at your passport prior to travel to insure that:

- 1) Your passport is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

Please note: Pages reserved for amendments and endorsements cannot be used for visas.

AIRPORT FORMALITIES

Depending on your particular itinerary, you may fly into international airports at Bangkok, Chiang Mai or Phuket. All baggage is checked at passenger's risk. Please note that Bangkok airport has two terminals. If you arrive at Terminal 1, proceed through customs and turn right to enter the arrival area where our representative will be waiting to greet you. If you arrive at Terminal 2, you will follow the same procedure except you will turn left after customs to go to the arrival area.

Airport Departure Tax: The airport departure tax at for international flights is Baht 500 per person. For domestic flights (except Samui airport), the tax is Baht 30 per person/departure. At Samui airport, domestic departures are taxed at Baht 400 per person/departure.

CUSTOMS

Duty-Free Items: A reasonable amount of clothing for personal use, toilet articles, and professional

instruments may be brought in free of duty. You are allowed to bring in 200 cigarettes or 250 gr. of tobacco, 1 liter of liquor, plus a reasonable amount of perfume. Officially, one still-camera or one movie camera can be brought in without duty. Five rolls of still-camera film or three rolls of 8 or 16 mm movie-camera film may be brought in free of duty.

Prohibited Items: All narcotics (hemp, opium, cocaine, morphine, heroin), firearms, obscene literature, pictures or articles. **Penalties for drug trafficking are severe.** Antiques may be taken out of Thailand only with a certificate from the Fine Arts Department in Bangkok. A reputable dealer will be able to offer advice on the practicality of obtaining this certificate. Buddha statues old or otherwise may not be taken out of the country. (This does not apply to the very small items found in gift shops).

COMMUNICATION

Naturally, Thai is the national language but English is the secondary language of the elite. Thai is a tonal language belonging to the group of Ka-Tai languages, the five tones are monotone, low, falling, high, and rising. This can be a rather complicated language for the visitor; however, English is widely understood, particularly in Bangkok where it is almost the major commercial language. Ethnic and regional dialects are also spoken.

BANKING / CURRENCY

CURRENCY ~ The basic monetary unit in Thailand is the baht. A baht is divided into 100 satang. The following coins and notes are currently in use: coins - 25 and 50 satang; 1, 5 and 10 baht. The exchange rate varies. There are many online currency converters online or try your local bank for a referral.

Rates are slightly better when exchanging larger denominations. Exchange money at hotels or banks. At hotels, the rate might be cheaper and you can change money anytime. To receive a better rate at a bank, you are required to be there in the mornings. Keep all receipts, and do not accept 'tom' bills as they might not be accepted in some shops. Credit cards and traveler's checks are accepted at hotels, large department stores, and some fine restaurants.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks are generally open from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Most offices open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday, except on public holidays. Many shops and stores are open 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., seven days a week. Department stores are generally open from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 or 9:00 p.m.

HEALTH REQUIREMENTS

There are no required vaccinations, unless you are coming from an infected area. Yellow fever certificates are required for those who are coming

from an infected area. Please check the latest regulations with your local health office or National Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, GA (Tel: 404-332-4559). **Note:** If you are on medication, be sure to bring enough for the duration of the trip. Also, ask your doctor for a note detailing the drugs you are taking.

SAFETY

When visiting cities in Thailand or any country, common sense should be the guiding principle. Be sure to watch your purse and wallet. Take only the indispensable in your backpack or fanny pack. Do not take your passport, airline tickets, or all your money on day trips. Always leave these items and other valuables in the hotel safe. Take copies of your documents and only amount of money you think you will need.

Pamphlets addressing safety issues abroad are available at the Bureau of Consular Affairs' home page at <http://travel.state.gov>, or from the Superintendent of Document at U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

FOOD & DRINK

Water: Drink only readily available bottled or boiled water.

Dining: You can find places to eat 24 hours a day, but better avoid sidewalk stalls where, though food is cheap and palatable, hygienic conditions may not be up to standard.

From Tourism Authority of Thailand:

"Thai food is internationally famous. Whether chili-hot or comparatively bland, harmony is the guiding principle behind each dish. Thai cuisine is essentially a marriage of centuries-old Eastern and Western influences harmoniously combined into something uniquely Thai. Characteristics of Thai food depend on who cooks it, for whom it is cooked, for what occasion, and where it is cooked to suit all palates. Originally, Thai cooking reflected the characteristics of a waterborne lifestyle. Aquatic animals, plants and herbs were major ingredients. Large chunks of meat were eschewed. Subsequent influences introduced the use of sizeable chunks to Thai cooking.

With their Buddhist background, Thais shunned the use of large animals in big chunks. Big cuts of meat were shredded and laced with herbs and spices. Traditional Thai cooking methods were stewing and baking, or grilling. Chinese influences saw the introduction of stir frying and deep-frying.

Culinary influences from the 17th century onwards included Portuguese, Dutch, French and Japanese. Portuguese missionaries who had acquired a taste for them while in South America introduced chilies to Thailand in the late 1600s. Thais were very adept at 'Siamese-izing' foreign cooking methods, and substituting ingredients. Ghee used in Indian cooking

was replaced by coconut oil, and coconut milk substituted for other daily products. Powerful pure spices were toned down and enhanced by fresh herbs such as lemon grass and galanga. Eventually, fewer and less spices were used in Thai curries, while the use of fresh herbs increased. It is generally acknowledged that Thai curries burn intensely, but briefly, whereas other curries, with strong spices, burn for longer periods.

Instead of serving dishes in courses, a Thai meal is served all at once, permitting dinners to enjoy combinations of different tastes. A Thai meal should consist of a soup, a curry dish with condiments, a dip with accompanying fish and vegetables. A spiced salad may replace the curry dish. Soup can also be spicy, but curry should be replaced by non spiced items. There must be a harmony of tastes and textures within individual dishes and the entire meal."

Note: If you are a vegetarian, have food allergies, or are on a special diet, please notify your travel agent or our office in advance, so that we may try to comply with your needs. Also, please advise your travel agent or our office if you have **any mobility restrictions**, so that we may inform our representatives accordingly. They will always strive to accommodate you to the best of their ability.

ELECTRICITY

The voltage throughout the country is 220 volts 50 cycles. Please check any electrical appliance before using. Some hotels may provide adapters to guests. Outlets have bayonet lamp sockets and two or three round pins.

LUGGAGE

Please see our luggage fact sheet enclosed with your final documents.

CLOTHING

Please see our luggage and packing lists enclosed with your final itinerary.

What to Wear: Light, loose fitting cotton garments are still the best, including cotton socks. Bring whatever specialized clothing and shoes as may be necessary for the more adventurous excursions such as trekking and mountain climbing. A jacket or sweater may be necessary in the cool season, especially in a mountainous area in the North.

Proper attire: Please be sure to observe appropriate dress codes when visiting religious sanctuaries, buildings, sites, or palaces, where modesty is the rule. If you are inappropriately dressed, you will not be allowed to enter. Casual clothing is acceptable for tourists, but when visiting special places **do not** wear short shorts, halter-tops or muscle shirts.

Laundry Service: is available in the hotels and resorts. The service is inexpensive although the turn around time in many cases will depend upon the weather. No sun means it takes longer for the clothing to dry.

THAI CUSTOMS

Greetings & Respect: Thais don't normally shake hands when they greet one another, but instead press the palms together in a prayer-like gesture called a *wai*. Generally, a younger person *wais* an elder, who returns the greeting.

Each Buddha image, large or small, ruined or not, is regarded as a sacred object. NEVER climb onto one to take a photograph or do anything that might indicate a lack of respect.

The same is true of the royal family. Thais have great respect and fondness for the royal family, so do not say anything they would find insulting or disrespectful.

Buddhist monks are forbidden to touch or be touched by a woman, or to accept anything from the hand of one. If a woman has to give anything to a monk, she first hands it to a man, who then offers it to the monk.

Thais regard the head as the highest part of the body, literally and figuratively. Therefore, do not touch people, even children, on the head. Never point to anything casually with your foot, use your finger instead. When standing or seated, never angle your foot in such a way that it is conspicuous or that the sole is visible. This is very rude.

Public displays of affection between men and women are frowned upon, just as showing one's temper is considered poor manners.

Prior appointments are necessary and punctuality is a sign of courtesy.

In a Muslim mosque, men should wear hats and women should be well covered with slacks or a long skirt, a long-sleeved blouse buttoned to the neck, and a scarf over the hair. All should remove their shoes before entering the mosque and should not be present if there is a religious gathering

A word about shoes: Shoes, except for visits to upscale restaurants and hotels, should be comfortable. They should be removed when entering a private Thai home. You may also be required to take off your shoes in some places of business. Forego laced hiking and walking boots, which are necessary at times, for more casual footwear when visiting attractions and sites that require frequent removal of shoes. You may wear shoes when walking around the compound of a Buddhist temple, but **not** inside the chapel where the principal Buddha image is kept. Also, avoid stepping directly on doorills, where Thai tradition says spirits may live.

Tipping: Tipping is not a usual practice in Thailand although it is becoming more common. Most hotels

and restaurants add a 10% service charge to the bill. Taxi drivers do not require a tip, but the gesture is appreciated.

Hospitality/Gift Giving: Guests should show interest in the host's family and house but should not compliment one object too greatly, as the host might feel obliged to make a gift of it. Normally, small souvenirs and flowers are acceptable gifts. Gifts are usually wrapped.

Conversation: Topics to avoid in conversation include politics, the royal family, and religion.

SHOPPING

Travel light. Clothing is inexpensive, and all kinds of shirts, slacks, shoes and accessories are readily available in the stores and on the streets of the cities in Thailand, even for the budget minded. Of course, souvenir T-shirts are available in all tourist destinations. You have wide range of good buys to choose from. They are beautiful because Thais are gifted artists, and inexpensive because the labor cost is low. Your guide will be happy to share information on current prices with you.

Bargaining: Fixed prices are the norm in department stores, but most other places encourage bargaining. Generally, you can obtain a final figure of between 10-40% lower than the original asking price. Much depends on your skills and the shopkeeper's mood. But remember, Thais appreciate good manners and a sense of humor. With patience and a broad smile, you will not only get a better price, you will also enjoy shopping as an art.

LUXURIOUS THAI SILK

Silk is a spun commodity that requires more knowledge and understanding than most people think. Silk produced in different parts of the world has different properties and textures. Chinese silk, for example, tends to be smooth and satiny while Indian silk is softer with richer colors and a crinkled look. Italian silk has an elegant look of high fashion, and Thai silk shows natural blended textures and patterns that are traditionally Southeast Asian.

Thai silk products include fabric lengths in 2-ply and 4-ply, shirts, blouses, scarves, neckties, bathrobes, kimonos, men's suits, ladies' silk jackets, bedcovers and home furnishings. Prices sometimes differ greatly depending on whether you buy at a factory site or in a shop or stall at Chiang Mai's Night Bazaar.

In selecting silk products, shoppers should be aware that a new line of imitation silk is also sold in Thailand. This is not found at the silk factories and showrooms, but sometimes it is seen at bazaars and smaller shops. Some visitors have mistakenly purchased the imitation because producers of the imitation product label it "Real Thai Silk."

Recognizing Real Silk: Five basic guidelines can be used to identify all-natural Thai silk -- price, weave, luster, print, and the burn test. Generally, for a 100-percent silk item, expect the cost to range from 600 Baht to 2,500 Baht, depending on the item. The same item in imitation silk will be priced from 100 Baht to 250 Baht. Weave is another indication. Real silk is completely handmade of a natural fiber and thus clearly shows small flaws or joins in the thread along the warp and the weft. Imitation polyester, on the other hand, is machine-made and has a perfect surface with no flaws or bumps. Luster is the third guideline, and a small light test shows whether a fabric is real or imitation. Thai silk is made with one color for the warp and one color for the weft, which gives it a natural sheen and luster and makes it unique. Hold a piece of natural silk up to the light. Its overall color tone will change depending on the angle of light. Imitation silk shines white regardless of angle.

In 100-percent Thai silk, the printed pattern will be on one side with only an outline of the print on the reverse side. When both sides are held up to the light, only the full print side will change color. Colors are not evident on the reverse side. With an imitation print, the pattern print and colors can be seen on one side while a plain color can be seen on the reverse side; and, both sides shine white when held to the light.

Thai silk is one of the finest fabrics in the world. We hope this small guide will help you in your selections.