

BIG FIVE®

TOURS & EXPEDITIONS

Enriching Lives Through Distinctive Journeys

Destination Information Guide

Thailand



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Welcome to the World of Big Five!

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.

Big Five Tours & Expeditions is pleased to welcome you on this exciting adventure. We take great care to insure that your travel dreams and expectations are well met. Our distinctive journeys allow you to experience the finest aspects each destination has to offer. We also aim to provide you with a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the places you'll visit and the people you'll meet.



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

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

Greenwich Mean Time (GMT +7:00). Thailand does not observe Daylight Savings Time.

PASSPORTS & VISAS

Passports: For international travel, a passport valid for at least six months from date of departure, containing at least 3 blank pages are necessary.

Visas: Many countries require travelers to obtain visas prior to arrival. Big Five Tours & Expeditions has appointed Trivisa to process required visas for our passengers. You can find the necessary forms from Trivisa's website at: www.trivisa.com. Please use account code JP1551, and follow the directions.

Important: Even if you do not need a visa prior to departure, please check your passport well in advance of departure to insure:

- 1) It is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa/entry 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. Please note that the new Bangkok airport one large passenger terminal complex together with both domestic and international.

Meeting point – You will arrive on the 2nd floor. After finished immigration, look for your guide who will have a signboard with your name on the left side of the hall after you have picked up your luggage. The guide will take you to the car on first floor. It will help you to visit this website ahead of time to see the layout of the Bangkok airport. http://www.tatnews.org/tourism_news/3033.asp

Airport Departure Tax: The airport departure tax at for international flights is THB700, THB500 of which is included in your ticket. You *may* need to pay the additional BHT200 upon departure. 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. The following passengers are **exempted from PSC:** *-Infants (children under 2 years old), -Transit/Transfer passengers*

All taxes are regulated by the government and subject to change without notice.

CUSTOMS INTO THAILAND

The following goods may be imported into Thailand without incurring customs duty by any person, irrespective of age: 200 cigarettes or 250g of tobacco or equal weight of cigars, 1liter of alcoholic liquor.

Prohibited Items: Illegal drugs, firearms and ammunition. **Warning: Any drug-related offences are severely punished and may result in life imprisonment or even the death penalty.**

Note: The export of archaeological or historical items cannot be exported without a certificate of authorization from the Department of Fine Arts in Thailand. The export of images of the Buddha and other religious artifacts are also subject to this ruling. Radio transceiver equipment, plant and living materials, live animals or products, medicines and chemicals also require a permit from the relevant government agency.

US CUSTOMS

Returning U.S. residents are allowed to bring back \$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. There are limits on some items. Regulations frequently change. For a list of exempt items and more information contact your nearest Customs office or write the U.S. Customs Service, Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044.

HEALTH

Anyone traveling internationally should be in generally good health. Talk with your personal physician about any shots or boosters recommended depending on your personal health profile and your itinerary. Tetanus and polio vaccines should be up to date. Also, discuss your general fitness level for participating in the activities related to your specific tour (i.e. snorkeling, hiking, nature walks, etc.).

Yellow Fever: Yellow fever inoculation is required if one of the following applies:

- If you are coming from any area other than the United States, Europe, or Canada.
- If you plan on visiting more than one African country.

Japanese Encephalitis: if you plan to visit rural farming areas and under special circumstances, such as a known outbreak of Japanese encephalitis.

Please note: If you are on medication, be sure to bring enough for the duration of the trip. Prescription medicines should always be carried in their original containers in your hand luggage.

Health insurance is strongly advised during any foreign travel. Please check the latest regulations with your local health office or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); fax: 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299), or their main telephone number in Atlanta, 404-332-4559. Or, visit the CDC Internet home page at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

CLOTHING

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

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.

A word about shoes: Shoes, should be removed when entering a private Thai home. You may also be required to take off your shoes in some places of business. 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. Avoid stepping directly on doorsills, where Thai tradition says spirits may live.

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.

LUGGAGE

For general baggage information, please review the Travel Handbook in your pre-departure materials.

In this security conscious era, airline luggage restrictions may change without notice. Also, luggage limits vary depending on ticket class, plane size, destinations, etc. It is always best to confirm with airlines for specific limitations. Scheduled flights from other countries and within foreign countries generally limit luggage to 44 pounds total, plus one carry-on personal item. Further restrictions may apply for charter flights. This will vary with destination and type of planes used. We will advise you of those restrictions in your final itinerary.

MONEY

Baht (THB; symbol ฿) = 100 satang. Notes are in denominations of ฿1,000, 500, 100, 50, 20 and 10. Coins are in denominations of ฿10, 5, 2 and 1, and 50 and 25 satang.

Currency Exchange: Foreign currencies can be exchanged at banks (which have the best rates), hotels (which charge high commissions) and, in larger towns, change bureau (generally open 0800-2000). Outside large towns and tourist areas, notes higher than ฿500 may be difficult to exchange, so visitors are advised to carry small change.

Credit/Debit Cards, ATMs: American Express, MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted. ATMs are found in all major cities and almost all provincial banks.

Traveler's checks: Accepted by all banks and large hotels and shops. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travelers are advised to take traveler's checks in US Dollars, Euros or Pounds Sterling.

LANGUAGE

Thai is the official language. English is widely spoken, especially in establishments catering to tourists. Ethnic and regional dialects are also spoken.

ELECTRICITY

220 volts AC, 50Hz. Some hotels may provide adapters to guests. Outlets have bayonet lamp sockets and two or three round pins.

FOOD & DRINK

All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Bottled water and drinks are easy to get. Use bottled water for drinking, brushing teeth, cleaning contacts, or making ice. Otherwise, all water should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilized. Stick to bottled water. Milk is unpasteurized and should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised. Avoid dairy products which are likely to have been made from unboiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled.

National specialties: *Tom yam* (coconut-milk soup prepared with *makroot* leaves, ginger, lemon grass, prawns or chicken). *Gang pet* (hot 'red' curry with coconut milk, herbs, garlic, chilies, shrimp paste, coriander and seasoning) served with rice.

Pad Thai (stir-fried rice-noodles) served with shrimp or chicken garnished with peanuts. Desserts include *salim* (sweet noodles in coconut milk). Well worth trying is sticky rice and mangoes (rice cooked in coconut milk served with slices of mango). This is a favorite breakfast dish in the mango harvest season (March to May).

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.

TIPPING

Tipping should be done at your discretion and as a reward for good or exceptional service.

For general tipping guidelines please refer to:

www.cntraveler.com/travel-tips/travel-etiquette/2008/12/Etiquette-101-Tipping-Guide

SHOPPING

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. Thais are gifted artists. Your guide will be happy to share information on current prices with you.

Bargaining: Fixed prices is 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.

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.

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."

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.

Always insure that your purchases will be allowed back into the U.S. Information is available at the U.S. Customs & Immigration website: www.customs.ustras.gov.

THAI CUSTOMS

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.

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

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.

SUGGESTED READING LIST

Many comprehensive and readily available guides are produced by Lonely Planet, Fodor, Insight, The Rough Guide, etc. Here are a few selections we thought might interest you. Barnes and Noble, www.barnesandnoble.com, and Longitude Books, www.longitudebooks.com, have collections of books, searchable by country.

THAILAND: A SHORT HISTORY

by **David K. Wyatt**

This highly acclaimed book, the standard history of Thailand for almost twenty years, has now been completely revised by the author. David K. Wyatt has also added new sections examining the social and economic changes that have transformed the country in the past two decades. "Wyatt knows his subject well enough and has enough enthusiasm for it to make his book . . . entertaining as well as eminently educational." -David McElveen, *Asiaweek*; "A very readable account. . . . We come away from reading it with a clearer understanding of where Thailand stands in relation to its neighbors, who the Thai people are, how the Thai government evolved into its present form."-James Stent, *Asian Wall Street Journal*.

BANGKOK 8

by **John Burdett**

A thriller with attitude to spare, *Bangkok 8* is a sexy, razor-edged, often darkly hilarious novel set in one of the world's most exotic cities.

Witnessed by a throng of gaping spectators, a charismatic Marine sergeant is murdered under a Bangkok bridge inside a bolted-shut Mercedes Benz. Among the witnesses are the only two cops in the city not on the take, but within moments one is murdered and his partner, Sonchai Jitpleecheep—a devout Buddhist and the son of a Thai bar girl and a long-gone Vietnam War G.I.—is hell-bent on wreaking revenge. On a vigilante mission to capture his partner's murderer, Sonchai is begrudgingly paired with a beautiful FBI agent named Jones and captures her heart in the process. In a city fueled by illicit drugs and infinite corruption, prostitution and priceless art, Sonchai's quest for vengeance takes him into a world much more sinister than he could have ever imagined.

THAILAND

by **Tracey Boraas**

Let's visit Thailand, the Land of Smiles. Read about Buddhism, the religion of 90 percent of Thailand's people, and the monks in saffron-colored robes who depend on the kindness of their fellow Thais. Buddhist temples, along with Thailand's amazing wildlife, dazzling cities and spectacular beaches, draw tourists to the country and help fuel Thailand's fast-growing economy. Tradition and modern life merge in this country, which is the only southeastern country never colonized by another country.

THE FOOD OF THAILAND: A JOURNEY FOR FOOD LOVERS

by **Lulu Grimes, Kay Halsey, Lulu Grimes (Editor), Lulu Grimes (Editor), Alan Benson (Photographer)**

Thailand has an increasingly well-known and well-loved repertoire of dishes, some more familiar than others. This culinary journey guides readers through Bangkok's markets to the seafood freshly cooked on the beaches of the Gulf of Thailand, to the sweet-makers of Phetchaburi province to the rice-growing hill tribes of the northern region. *The Food of Thailand* features a myriad of dishes that make up modern Thai cuisine: from traditional green, red, and panaeng curries, eaten by every Thai, to salads like som tam and laap, redolent with herbs and chilies, and coconut-based soups, including the famous tom kha kai.

TRAVELERS' TALES THAILAND: TRUE STORIES

by **James O'Reilly (Editor), Larry Habegger (Editor)**

"The first title in a revolutionary new style of travel guidebooks.... It is an enriching and absorbing collection - a perfect traveling companion." - New York Times News Service Notable authors include: Jeff Greenwald, Karen Swenson, Charles Nicholl, Pico Iyer, Ian Buruma, and Thalia Zepatos.