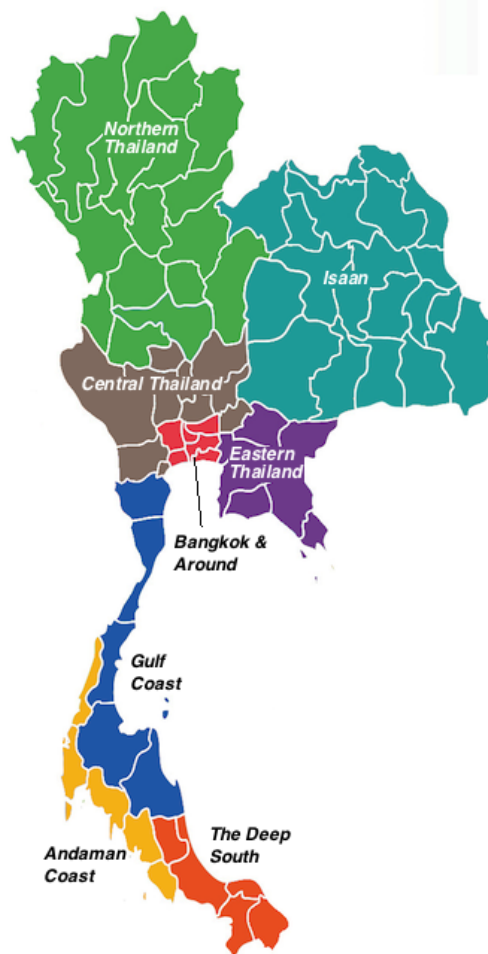

THAILAND

FLAG



FACTS AND STATISTICS

- Location: South-eastern Asia, bordering the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand, southeast of Burma
- Capital: Bangkok
- The Flag: The Thai flag was adopted in 1917 by royal decree. It consists of five horizontal stripes which, starting from the top, run in the following order: red, white, blue, white and red. On the direction of Rama VI, who commissioned the flag and considered 'blue' an important color, the middle blue strip is twice the width of the other four stripes. The red stripes denote the Thai people the white stripes denote religion and the blue stripe denotes the Thai Monarchy.
- National anthem: The national anthem of Thailand, entitled 'Phleng Chat' (literally translated as 'national anthem'), was adopted shortly after the country changed its name from 'Siam'. The national anthem is played twice a day on television and radio and Thais are expected to stand for its duration to show their respect. This custom is played out in public as part of the lifting of the flag in public areas such as the work place, schools, universities, prisons, hospitals etc.
- Ethnic Make-up: Thai 96%, Burmese 2%, other 2%.
- Population: 69 million (2019 est.)
- Population growth rate: 0.32% (2019 est.)
- Climate: tropical; rainy, warm, cloudy southwest monsoon (mid-May to September); dry, cool northeast monsoon (November to mid-March); southern isthmus always hot and humid
- Time Zone: The time zone used in Thailand is 'Indochina Time' (ICT) which is UTC +7
- Currency: Thai Baht
- Government: Thailand has a constitutional monarchy but is currently led by a military Junta which took power in May 2014, following which, General Prayuth Chan-ocha became Prime Minister. Following the 1932 Siamese coup d'état, in which the system of absolute monarchy was replaced by a constitutional monarchy, Thailand's military has seized power 12 times. The current King, Maha Vajiralongkorn, ascended the throne in 2016 following the death of his father, King Bhumibol Adulyadei. Much loved by the Thai people, King Bhumibol had lived to become the world's longest reigning monarchy prior to his death.
- Business Culture: Ranked 41st in the Business Culture Complexity Index™

INTRODUCTION TO THAILAND

Whilst its neighbors fell prey to the colonizing powers of Europe, Japan and the United States, Thailand holds a unique position in South East Asia for its ability to have retained its integrity.

This was not without a price however, as Thailand was not only compelled to give away large areas of land to the French and English but was also forced to end its position of neutrality during World War II

and side with the Japanese – or face being taken over. Called Siam until 1939, the bloodless Siamese coup d'état ended the rule of absolute monarchy and resulted in the renaming of the country to 'Thailand'.

Although Thailand had aligned with the Japanese during the second world war, it proceeded to become a US ally in 1954 whereby it fought alongside America during the Vietnam war.

Politically tumultuous, Thailand has faced coups in 1932, 1947 2006 and 2014. There is also considerable violence due to the ethno-nationalist insurgency taking place in its Malay-Muslim majority province which has resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians.



LANGUAGE IN THAILAND

The Thai language is comprised of 44 consonants, 32 vowels and five tones in Thai pronunciation, along with a script that has Indian origins.

The Thai language, belonging to the 'Tai' family, is the standard spoken language in Thailand and is used for governmental and administrative purposes across the country. Regional dialects are particularly distinct depending on whether the speaker is from the North or South of Thailand.

Other languages spoken in Thailand are Chinese, Lao, Malay and Mon-Khmer. The use of English is becoming more prevalent in government and commerce. It is also being taught as a second language in secondary school and universities, which enables the English-speaking visitor in Thailand to have little trouble conversing.

The largest concentration of people speaking Thai outside of the country is in the US; in particular in the states of California and Los Angeles.

THAI CULTURE & SOCIETY

Religion & Beliefs

With 93% of adherents, Buddhism is the official religion in Thailand with Islam as the largest minority religious group at 5% of adherents. Christians account for 1.2% of the Thai population and those in the 'other' or non-religious category account for 0.8%.

Major Celebrations/Secular Celebrations

Thais, from across both the public and private sector, typically enjoy upwards of 16 public holidays a year. Whilst some occur on the same day each year, others are based on the lunar calendar and dates are as such open to change. Let’s look at some of the most popular:

- New Year (31st December to 1st January) – The day typically starts with offerings and worship at the local Buddhist temple. As with most other countries, the time is then celebrated with family, friends, food and drink.
- Magha Puga (Falling on the third lunar month of the year) – Magha Puga (also transliterated as Makha Bucha or Magha Puja) is an important Buddhist celebration which is celebrated throughout the Buddhist world – including, but not limited to, Laos, Cambodia, Nepal and Myanmar. The occasion celebrates the special event in which Buddha transmitted the principles of Buddhism to over a thousand ‘Arahants’ or ‘Enlightened Ones’. Buddhists strive particularly on this day to avoid sin, carry out good actions and to purify one’s mind. Thais refer to these three principles as the ‘heart of Buddhism’.
- Chakri Day (6th April) - This holiday is celebrated within the public sector but less so within the private sector. Although Chakri Day celebrates both the coronation of Rama I to the throne in 1782 and the contributions of subsequent Kings to the current day King. The day is also used as an opportunity to prepare for the much loved, three-day long Songkran festival which falls three days after Chakri day.
- Songkran (13th April – 15th April) – Known as ‘Songkran’, the Thai New Year is one of the most loved Thai holidays and it is celebrated with vigor. The event is usually celebrated with parades, family events, food, drink and religious ceremonies. The most loved activities include water due to its association with purification. Prepare to get wet if you visit during this period as both children and adults have turned the occasion into a three-day long water fight! Even those passing by on motorbike are not immune from a good soaking.
- Visakha Puja (4th June) – Undoubtedly the holiest of Buddhist religious ceremonies, Visakha celebrates the birth, enlightenment and nirvana (the state to which Buddhists aspire of perfect peace and release from suffering) of Buddha. Those marking the occasion attend temple celebrations during the day and participate in circumbulations o the local temple during the evening.
- Chulalongkorn Day (23rd October) – This national holiday, marks the life of one of Thailand’s most revered Kings, King Chulalongkorn who died on 23rd October, 1910. He is credited with, amongst other accolades, maintaining the integrity of Thailand the face of aggressive European colonialization within the region and modernizing Thailand.
- Constitution Day (10th December) – Constitution Day celebrates the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932 and the introduction of the Thai constitutional monarchy. The day celebrates

the monarchy through parades and fireworks and thanks them for granting them the right to run their own affairs.

The Family

- Thai families are the cornerstone of life in Thailand and, although nuclear family setups are the norm, it is not uncommon for extended family members live with the family.
- Families are typically far more closely knit than those in western culture and hierarchy is more pronounced.

Social Stratification

- Social stratification demographics in Thailand have changed considerably over the last fifty years.
- Social stratification traditionally consisted of an elite section of Thai noble people, complimented by a small foreign merchant class, and a large class of poorer rural dwellers.
- Over the years however, these distinctions have changed and wealth has played a key role in establishing a middle class which has grown considerably.
- The elite class and poorer rural dwellers still exist, but the latter has grown to include poorer dwellers of the growing urban areas.

Gender Roles

- Traditional gender divisions exist in Thailand in respect to child care and domestic work, with women taking on the vast majority of these tasks.
- In an agricultural setting, there is a great deal of overlap in tasks carried out between the genders whilst men dominate roles within the religious sphere.
- Women make up almost half of the labour force and account for over half of the workforce.
- The Thai government are working to combat violence against women and women’s rights are built into the constitution.
- Most frequent violations against women include domestic abuse (affecting women across the socio-economic spectrum), discrimination and prostitution trafficking.

Socialization

- Children have a special place in Thai society and are typically doted on by family members and non-family adults.
- Mothers rarely, if ever, leave their babies and will typically take them wherever they go.
- Babies are weaned at two or three years of age. They learn from the people and implements around them and are often given access to the tools used by their parents.

-
- In this respect, the children of craftsmen, farmers etc. will grow up with a passive (and often active) understanding of parental crafts.
 - The government provide children with free education for a minimum period of 12 years and children are mandated to attend for at least 9 of these 12 years.

Food

- Thai cuisine is much loved internationally and Thai restaurants are a feature of most large cities around the world.
- In 2011, Thai dishes featured more than the dishes of any other country on an online CNN poll.
- Thai cuisine is a complex fusion of sweet, sour, salty, spicy and bitter flavors which are balanced in a way that creates ‘harmony’.
- Rice plays such an important role in Thai cuisine that the word for ‘rice’ and ‘food’ is the same.
- It is typically eaten at all meals and comes in the form of standard white rice, or, it is of the sticky, glutinous variety. It is usually eaten using a spoon and fork in dishes containing seafood, beef, pork, chicken or vegetables.

Thai cuisine varies depending on the region, with differences primarily reflecting the food preferences of the region’s neighbors. Many popular Thai dishes were introduced by the Chinese during the 15th century and European influences on Thai cuisine were gradually introduced from the 17th century onwards. Some of the most popular dishes include:

- Pad Thai – Pad Thai could well be considered a national Thai dish due to its popularity both in Thailand and abroad. It consists of noodles, with fish sauce, tamarind and stir fried with other ingredients such as egg, shrimp, shallots, garlic, ginger, chilli, soy sauce, bean sprouts and peanuts. It is often sold as street food.
- Thai Green Curry – This is a fragrant and popular dish, which consists of coconut cream, green chillies, lemon grass and a key ingredient such as chicken or fish balls.
- Tom Yum Soup –The basic building blocks of Tom Yum (or Tom Yam) soup are lemon grass, lime juice, fish sauce, chillies and kaffir lime. Shrimp is then typically used as the key ingredient.

Arts, Humanities & Popular Culture

- The arts are supported by both private and public groups.
- There are colleges of dance, music and drama in Thailand and a very popular national theatre.
- There are also organisations which support the work of Thai artisans

-
- Fictional writing has changed greatly over the years, and modern fiction is generally built around plots which detail the lives of ordinary people; particularly depicting the struggles of those in the poorer classes
 - Traditional folk dance have influenced a love of classical dance in Thailand and national festivals are fairly popular events.

SOCIAL CUSTOMS & ETIQUETTE IN THAILAND

Naming conventions

- The first name is usually preceded by the word ‘Khun’ (pronounced ‘Koon’) which is used as a blanket term to refer to Miss, Mrs or Mr – for example, Khun Mary or Khun Simon.
- People of importance, such as teachers, professors or monks, the first name should be preceded with ‘Ajarn’.
- Surnames are reserved for very formal occasions or written documentation.
- It is not uncommon for Thais to assign nicknames to each other.

Meeting & Greeting

- The ‘wai’ is the traditional form of greeting, given by the person of lower status to the person of higher status.
- The wai is the common form of greeting and adheres to strict rules of protocol.
- Raising both hands, palms joined with the fingers pointing upwards as if in prayer, lightly touching the body somewhere between the chest and the forehead, is the standard form.
- The wai is both a sign of respect as well as a greeting. Respect and courtesy are demonstrated by the height at which the hands are held and how low the head comes down to meet the thumbs of both hands.
- The wai may be made while sitting, walking, or standing.
- The person who is junior in age or status is the first one to offer the wai.
- The senior person returns the wai, generally with their hands raised to somewhere around their chest.
- If a junior person is standing and wants to wai a senior person who is seated, the junior person will stoop or bow their head while making the wai.
- If there is a great social distance between two people, the wai will not be returned.
- If invited to a Thai home, then allow your host and hostess to introduce you to the other guests. This enables other guests to understand your status relative to their own, and thus know who performs the wai and how low the head should be bowed.

Communication style

- Close friends may be tactile with one another and it’s not unusual to see friends of the same sex often hold hands with one another.
- Hand gestures may be used to enhance speech but it’s important that the actions are calm and never aggressive.
- Thais are gentle people and are likely to be offended and upset by aggressive speech or mannerisms.
- ‘Face’ is important to Thais and it is important that you do nothing to affect someone’s ‘face’ – if you need to say something of a critical nature then ensure that you do so in private
- Thais are ‘indirect’ communicators and, as such are unlikely to directly say anything that may hurt or offend you. Instead, they may use vague responses or try to change the subject. Although this may appear to be indecisiveness on their part, efforts should be made to try and interpret their true feelings.
- Personal Space - When speaking to strangers Thais maintain a distance barrier of approximately one meter. This distance is lessened when speaking to close acquaintances. Although it is polite to retain eye contact during a conversation, it is expected that those in subordinate positions will bow their head during interactions with those of a revered rank in a demonstration of respect.

Gift Giving

- If invited to a Thai's home, a gift is not expected, although it will be appreciated.
- Gifts should be wrapped attractively, since appearance matters. Bows and ribbons add to the sense of festivity.
- Appropriate gifts are flowers, good quality chocolates or fruit.
- Do not give marigolds or carnations, as they are associated with funerals.
- Try to avoid wrapping a gift in green, black or blue as these are used at funerals and in mourning.
- Gold and yellow are considered royal colors, so they make good wrapping paper.
- Only use red wrapping paper if giving a gift to a Chinese Thai.
- Gifts are not opened when received.
- Money is the usual gift for weddings and ordination parties.

Dining & Food

- A fork and spoon are the usual eating utensils. However, noodles are often eaten with chopsticks.
- The spoon is held in the right hand and the fork in the left. The fork is used to guide food on to the spoon. Sticky rice, a northern Thai delicacy, is often eaten with the fingers of the right hand.

-
- Most meals are served as buffets or with serving platters in the center of the table family- style.
 - You may begin eating as soon as you are served.
 - Leave a little food on your plate after you have eaten to show that you are full. Finishing everything indicates that you are still hungry.
 - Never leave rice on your plate as it is considered wasteful. The words for food and rice are the same. Rice has an almost mystical significance in addition to its humdrum 'daily bread' function.
 - Never take the last bite from the serving bowl.
 - Wait to be asked before taking a second helping.
 - Do not lick your fingers.

Visiting a home

If you are invited to a Thai's house:

- Arrive close to the appointed time, although being a few minutes late will not cause offense.
- Check to see if the host is wearing shoes. If not, remove yours before entering the house.
- Ask another guest to confirm the dress code.
- Step over the threshold rather than on it. This is an old custom that may be dying out with younger Thais, but erring on the side of conservatism is always a good idea.

Taboos in Thailand

- Do not use aggressive gestures or overly loud speech during conversation.
- Do not sit with your feet pointing towards people.
- If sleeping in a Thai home then avoid sleeping with your feet towards the family altar.
- Do not give black gifts or yellow flowers as gifts.
- Do not criticize the royal family.
- Do not touch the top of someone's head as this is considered the most sacred part of the body.
- Do not eat with your left hand.