



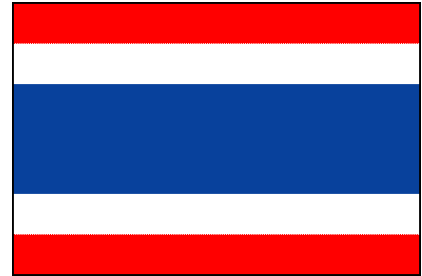
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THAILAND PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION (Please only print if necessary. Think before you print!)

Country Profile

- Official Name:** Kingdom of Thailand
- Population:** 64 million
- Capital City:** Bangkok, population c. 8,160,522
- People:** 75% Thai, 14% Sino, 3% Malay; Mon; Khmer
- Language:** Thai
- Currency:** Thai Baht (TB)
- Major Industries:** Electronics, gems and jewellery, footwear, textiles, clothing, mobiles, tourism, and export of textiles, computer & components, integrated circuits and parts
- Time Zone:** GMT +7 hours
- Electricity:** 220V, 50 Hz 2 pin & 3 pin grounded plugs
- Measurements and weights:** Metric
- International Dialing Code:** +66



Before Departure Checklist



- Travel Insurance
- Valid Passport and Visa
- Inoculations
- Foreign currency or ATM card (preferably 2 in separate locations)
- Tickets
- Photocopy of passport either scanned into email account or separate from the original.



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Travel Insurance (compulsory)

Buffalo Tours Thailand will do everything possible to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip. However, certain risks are involved and should be recognized by participants. Thus, we highly recommend the purchase of short-term travel insurance for our adventures. Travel Insurance is a cost effective way to protect yourself and your equipment in the event of problems due to Canceled Trips, Delays, Medical Problems, Baggage Loss or Damage. Travel insurance is easily and cheaply available online. We recommend www.worldnomads.com

Visas / Passports

Royal Thai Embassies or Consulates worldwide (see: <http://www.thaiembassy.org/>) can provide you with a variety of different visas depending on your travel needs. Note that your passport must be valid for six months after your planned date of departure from the country when you apply for the visa with the Royal Thai Embassy or the Consulate in your country.

You can get your visa in advance at any Royal Thai Embassy or Consulate. Otherwise you can obtain your visa at the border 'on arrival'; such a visa will be valid for 30 days and is free for most nationalities. No picture is required.

A fine of 500B per day is incurred daily for overstaying the length of a visa. Although this fine can be paid upon departure at the airport, you should avoid doing this at all costs. Visas can be extended for 2 weeks at immigration offices across the Kingdom.

We strongly advise you to make copies of all your important documents (visa, passport, credit cards, air-tickets, etc.) If lost, these copies will be invaluable in replacing the originals.

Immunizations

You should check with a doctor (tropical medicine) in your own country about two months before planned departure to learn what type of vaccinations / immunizations he recommends when visiting Thailand. There is a risk of mosquito-borne diseases (Dengue Fever; Malaria) in some rural parts of Thailand. Visitors to SE Asia often require the following vaccinations:

- Hepatitis A and B
- Tetanus
- Typhoid
- Polio
- Diphtheria

You can check also with the Center for Disease Control (<http://www.cdc.gov/>) for the latest health warnings or dangers anywhere.



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Suggested Multi Purpose Packing List

We recommend you don't bring too much! Many guests – especially first time travelers – pack far more than they need. Too much baggage can be difficult to keep track of, and simply too heavy. You will find every type of clothing, and quality of clothing in Thailand. All brands of toiletries and cosmetics are available here (tooth paste; soap; shampoo). Sanitary pads are widely available, even in the countryside. Here are some items you should bring with you, or buy once you arrive in Bangkok:



- If you wear **contact lenses**, make sure to bring enough **cleaning fluid** in the case you will visit remote areas, or islands.
- **Mosquito repellent** (prevention is always the best cure) + **Sun screen cream**: after a day in the sun, you'll thank yourself
- **Prescription medications**: All medications are available her, but if you take prescription medicine, you should bring extra, so that misplacing a medication will not harm your trip.
- **Kinds of Clothing**: Light thin layers of cotton clothing are the best.
 - o A **light long-sleeved shirt & long pants** for early evenings, mainly because you can prevent mosquito-borne diseases best thru prevention. These longer garments are also mandatory if entering a temple, to show respect
 - o A **light sport coat or jumper**
 - o A **windbreaker jacket** for light rain
- **Camera!**

Money



The Thai Baht is the official currency of the Kingdom. US dollars and most other currencies can be changed these days at banks all over major cities, exchange booths, and even at banks in the countryside. As of May 2009, The Thai Baht rate of exchange rate to the US Dollar was about 34 to 1. You can find the latest exchange rates and convert currencies to Thai Baht here (<http://www.xe.com/ucc/>).

Travelers' checks (in US dollar or Euro) can be cashed at banks. Credit cards (Visa, MasterCard and Amex) are accepted in major hotels and in many shopping venues in Bangkok or big cities. Please note that there is usually a levy of 4 % charged on credit card purchases by local banks.

ATM machines are common, and many of them allow you to draw from an international account. Nevertheless when in the countryside, or rural areas, you should prepare small denomination Thai Baht notes (since not everyone has change for big ones), and some extra cash.



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Carry your money in a way that you will feel most comfortable with e.g. money belt, wallet etc. You may want to carry a combination of travelers' checks, credit/debit cards, cash or all three. It's always a good precaution to split your money about your person and/or wallet. Most hotels offer safe-keeping for your valuables if you so wish.

Trip Budgeting

Allow \$5- \$15 per meal for additional meals not included in the trip price. You may also want to have some cash for shopping in markets etc. You should budget according to your taste.

Arriving in Thailand



Buffalo Tours Thailand typically arranges transfers to and from the international airport to hotel for most guests. Your itinerary will indicate clearly whether this is the case for you or not.



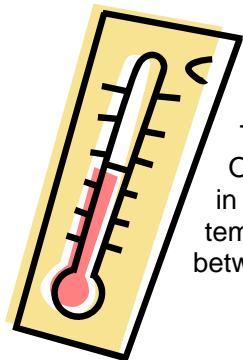
After completing customs and immigration formalities, you will exit into the public area of the airport. Your English-speaking guide will be carrying a Buffalo Tours Thailand sign (see our logo to the right), which also has your name prominently displayed on it.

In Case of Emergency

Your agent should give you the name and mobile phone number of your guide before you arrive in Thailand. But please note the following numbers, and save in case of emergencies:

- **Emergency:** Khun PC, Operations Manager +66-(0)86-722-7381
- **Buffalo Bangkok Office:** +66 (0)2-611-1988

More about Thailand



Climate

Thailand has a tropical monsoon climate with two distinct seasons. May to October is the rainy season and November to April is the dry season. It gets hottest in March and April when temperatures can reach as high as 38C/100F. The lowest temperatures, usually in December are around 15C/59F. The average temperature is between 25C/77F and 30C/84F.

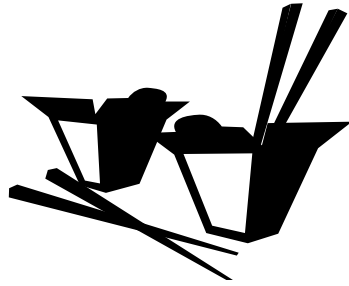


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There are different advantages to travel at different times of the year; dry season is absolutely fabulous weather, but prices are higher because this is high season. The green season – even you can expect a bit of rain on most days – is also a great time to visit Thailand, as it is cooler, and guests will enjoy a cost benefit too. But Thailand is lovely all year round

Cuisine



Thai food is usually eaten 'family style', where several different dishes are served in the middle of the table, and each diner a plate of rice before them. You may then spoon as much or little of whatever dish you fancy. A proper 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. The soup can also be spicy, but the curry should be replaced by non spiced items. There must be a harmony of tastes and textures within individual dishes and the entire meal. But that is a Central Thai meal, and Thai food is has perhaps more variety than any other Asian fare. Flavours and foods from each region of the country have distinctive & unique characteristics. Thai people use forks and spoons, but rarely knives. Chopsticks are used, but for noodle dishes.

Chilli-hot or bland, harmony is the guiding principle behind all Thai food, and it is essentially a pastiche of centuries-old Eastern and Western influences harmoniously combined into something uniquely Thai. Chinese influences saw the introduction of frying, stir frying and deep-frying. Culinary influences from the 17th century onwards included Portuguese, Dutch, French and Japanese. Chillies were introduced to Thai cooking during the late 1600s by Portuguese missionaries who had acquired a taste for them while serving in South America. Instead of serving dishes in courses, a Thai meal is served all at once, permitting dinners to enjoy complementary combinations of different tastes.

Vegetarian Food

Widely available, in no small part due to the strong Buddhist influence. Bottled mineral water, soft drinks, tea and coffee are readily available. Beer is the main alcoholic drink and is usually a light lager style.

Food to Avoid

As a general rule, travelers should avoid tap water, ice made from tap water, uncooked food, fruit or vegetables that are not peeled, and street vendor offerings (unless recommended by your guide) . Traveler's diarrhea is common and easily treated, choose a remedy that works best for you (Imodium, Pepto-Bismol, etc...); antibiotic solutions are also available for intestinal ills.



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Special Diet?

If you have special dietary needs, or if you are a vegetarian, vegan, or allergic to any foods, please advise your guide immediately if you have not already notified us during planning stages. We can accommodate any diet, but the more advance notice you give us, the easier it is.

Drinking Water

Please drink ONLY Bottled water. It can be purchased almost everywhere, at local convenience stores, hotels, restaurants, supermarkets, etc. If camping with us or visiting a remote area, we will provide for you. If you wish to add water purification tablets to the water, you should bring those with you.

Responsible Tourism

Please read our separate Responsible Tourism Guidelines before you arrive in Asia. We want to ensure that all our clients travel as responsibly as possible to ensure the future of is sustainable

People

The Thai (or ethnic Tai) make up approximately 80% of the nation's population of approximately 64.5 million. The population is relatively homogeneous, with more than 85% speaking a Tai language, and sharing a common culture. This core population includes the central Thai (33.7% of the population, including Bangkok), Northeastern Thai (34.2%), northern Thai (18.8%), and southern Thai (13.3%).

Dozens of unique minority tribal groups live in Thailand, but despite this rich heritage, they are becoming increasingly integrated into the mainstream Thai language & culture. This is due in large part to a campaign by the Thai government to modernize all Thai people, as well as due to outside influences of television, Internet and local radio broadcasts. Younger members of tribal groups in Thailand prefer to be called Thais rather than by their traditional tribal group name. This is the trend.

Language



Thailand is located geographically midway between India and China, and the language too is influenced heavily by both Sanskrit and Chinese. "Phasa Thai" (Thai language) is the national and official language of Thailand and the mother tongue of the Thai people, Thailand's dominant ethnic group. Tonal and analytic, Thai's complex orthography, relational markers and a distinctive phonology can make this language difficult to learn for those who do not already speak a related language. Thai is mutually intelligible with Lao.



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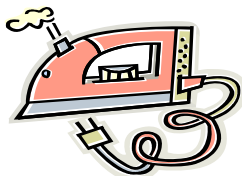
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Post , E-mail & Telecommunication



Depending on your (foreign) provider, many mobile phones will receive a signal in major towns like Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Phuket. But you can also easily purchase a local SIM card. Services for making international phone calls are widely available. All major tourism centers offer internet access (rates in Bangkok are about 40 Baht for 1 hour) and some provide chat-webcams. Email is the cheapest and fastest way to communicate while travelling.

Electricity and Adaptors in Thailand



The electricity in Thailand operates at 220 volts, 50 Hz. Some appliances such as Notebook adaptors, Cellular phone chargers, electric shavers, digital camera chargers will likely support universal voltage (any system from 100 volts to 250 volts). **However, please verify voltage requirement of your appliances before**

plugging them into the socket. Most parallel (rectangular or round) connectors will fit. Otherwise, an adaptor is needed.



Most sockets in Thailand are like that on the left, and plugs fitting such will look like those on the right. Those European plugs on the bottom will require an adapter.



Cultural Differences and Points to Remember / Some “Dos & Don’t’s”

Thailand is easily the most hospitable, ‘user-friendly’ country in Asia. And common sense seems to dictate that patience & courtesy should open many doors. The above is true, but of all the Asian countries, Thailand is one of the least diluted in terms of culture; **and protocol is more important than it looks here!** Fortunately the easy-going Thais are accustomed to ‘faux pas’ foreigners make while stomping through their country. Nevertheless, doing some homework on Thai manners & sensibilities is well worth the effort, and will endear you greatly to the Thai people, cause it’s not as easy as ‘simply shaking hands & speaking politely’. The famous “Wai” greeting is unique to Thailand and central to daily interaction. Too nuanced to describe in detail here, the “Wai” greeting is performed differently, depending on the social ranking of the person to whom one is speaking. There is also protocol for receiving a “Wai”. Some other very basic points:



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- Public display of affection between men + women is not done in polite society (although you may see young Thai's holding hands in public).
- Topless bathing is inappropriate in Thailand.
- Thai's consider the head as the highest part of the body, both literally and figuratively. As a result they don't approve of touching anyone on the head, even as a friendly gesture.
- It is considered rude to point the sole of your foot at another person, so try to avoid doing so when sitting opposite someone, and following the concept that the foot is the lowest limb, don't point your foot to show anything to anyone.
- Buddhist monks are forbidden to touch or be touched by a woman, or to accept anything from the hand of one. If a woman wants to give anything to a monk or novice, she first hands it to a man, who then presents it. In case the woman wants to present it with her hand, the monk or novice will spread out a piece of saffron robe, and the woman will lay down the gift on the material.
- It is alright to wear shoes whilst walking around the grounds of a Buddhist temple, but not inside the chapel where the Buddha image is kept. Women should ensure that their legs and shoulders are covered before entering a Buddhist temple. Please do not wear shorts.
- The institution of Monarchy is sacred to Thais, and you should avoid discussing this altogether with Thais you do not know very well. If attending an event at which a member of the Royal Family is present, you should watch the other Thai people, and use their example as a guide to your behavior.
- "Mai pen rai" (Nevermind): On the other side of all the Thai protocol is "Mai Pen Rai", a key attitude in Thailand. Thailand is non confrontational by nature, easy going and don't bother too much with small, unnecessary problems. All things should be "Sanuk" (fun), and keeping life hassle-free is essential. Of course such an approach to life means complaining about anything is always awkward. Which is why so many situations met with a smile, or with a "mai pen rai".

Attire

In Bangkok, one may see all manner of attire, and many 'exceptions to the rules' which Buffalo advises you in this document. But to prevent the wrath of the gods as well as the locals, these guidelines should be closely followed. Typical Thai people dress very modestly, and its better to dress more conservatively if unsure. Long pants better than short, although the latter more popular every day. Skirts should be below knee-length. Bare shoulders are a not appreciated. Going bra-less, and wearing tight body-hugging clothes is not acceptable, and will cause derision. As previously mentioned, more **formal dress codes usually apply for temples or mosques** or any other religious sites you may visit.



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Swimming (Attire)

You will never see Thais nude bathing at any beach, or place one might swim in Thailand. **Please do not do this.** In fact, it may surprise you to see Thais bathing with all their clothes on!

Saving Face

It is inappropriate to express anger in a raised voice. Becoming angry is embarrassing to the local people with whom you are dealing - they will not be embarrassed for themselves, but for you making a fool of yourself. "Keeping face", that subtle but important quality of personal dignity, is important! Personal candor in Asia is largely a matter of sensibility and face.

Tips

Tipping is a personal matter, and tips for guides and drivers are completely at your discretion, but here are some guidelines: Buffalo encourages guests to tip an amount they feel is appropriate to the situation. Note that in Thailand, most restaurants have a tip-share system, so if you wish to tip only the waiter who served you, give the tip to him yourself, into his hand (not leave it in the bill folder). Below are some suggestions for tipping:



- **Guides:** based on their performance as you evaluate it
 - o \$5 per half day, \$10 per full day tour per person for guides
 - o \$2 for half day and \$5 per person for full day for drivers \
- **Meals in restaurants:** \$1-2 for good service.
- **Bellboys:** up to you, but average amount is US\$ 1 USD per piece of luggage
- **Chambermaid / Housekeeping service:** up to you, but average is US\$ 1-2 USD per day.

Suggested Reading

Buffalo Thailand arranges fun and very useful cultural seminars in the arts (on request) for guests touring the country, and for businessmen (ref: Origin program). Below is a book you can read to give yourself a good grounding in Thai sensibilities:



Very Thai - Everyday Popular Culture by Philip Cornwell-Smith

The visitor can turn to a guidebook for a short explanation of obvious sights, or to historical tomes explaining temples and sculptures. But this prodigiously illustrated effort by Cornwell-Smith is the first book to explain Thailand as it is today, and is useful even to people who've lived in Thailand for decades.



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Departure airport taxes

Airport departure tax is included

Donations and gift-giving



it is acceptable and laudable to help the elderly or the disabled (as there is little in terms of social security for these people). But giving money and goods away at random to individuals is bad because it results in local communities begging from tourists, and losing their dignity. If you give to children begging, this reinforces the notion that begging is acceptable. To prevent local people from seeing visitors as 'money dispensing ATMs', do not pay for acts of kindness; for example, paying to take a photograph of a local person. . We do not want to encourage the development of a society that equates every human action as a potential money making scheme.

Do not to give sweets to children in villages that we visit. Local people do not have access to dentists, nor can they afford them and again there is the issue of turning children into beggars. Pens, toothbrushes, clothing or other perhaps 'worthwhile' items are best distributed via a local charity, school teacher, or community leader.

Avoid feeling that you necessarily have to give 'material' things. The best giving can sometimes be shared interactions: a smile, a joke, a sing-song, dance or playing a game. Giving something of your friendship, time and interest to interact with locals can be the best gift of all.

And Finally...

We at Buffalo Tours do our best to facilitate your adventure by arranging all of the services that free you to get the most out of your experience. However, every traveler has his or her own idea and expectations of how the adventure will be. Bearing this in mind and considering our own experiences, we offer the suggestions below to ensure that your adventure meets and hopefully exceeds your expectations. Please also read our enclosed guidelines on Responsible Tourism so that that joy of cultural diversity unique to travelling is a beneficial experience for both yourself and the communities that you visit.

- Take responsibility for your adventure - do not assume your interests are shared by everyone else
- If you have any special interests (weavings, archaeology, religious art, jewelry, etc.) or wish to do some particular activities (mountain biking, kayaking etc.) let our guides or the hotel staffs know ahead of time. They will do their best to help you find what you want.
- Read up on Laos before you visit, you are sure to get more out of the experience if you have some familiarity with the history and culture of the country.



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- Most information provided by the guides is to give you a general understanding of what and where you are touring. Don't be shy! Ask questions if you want more specific information.
- English is widely spoken, but try to learn some Thai language before you arrive, as even a few words will endear you to the Thais.
- If you need something or have a problem, please let someone know. Our drivers, operators, guides and hotel staff are there to assist you.
- Where possible try to support locally owned businesses, hotels and restaurants. In particular try to buy from traditional artisans.
- While bargaining is part of the shopping culture in Asia, be realistic!
- Bring a book, journal, postcards or playing cards with you to occupy yourself when waiting.
- Remember the adage: "Take only photos, leave only footprints", but be sensitive with the photos and footprints!
- Smile! It will get you much further than losing your temper.
- Finally... welcome to The Kingdom of Thailand, and enjoy your holiday!