

Thailand

An everyday guide to
expatriate life and work.

Contents

Quick Facts	3
Overview	3
Getting Started	
Climate and weather	4
Visas	4
Accommodation	4
Schools	4
Culture	
Language	6
Social etiquette	6
Eating	6
Drinking	6
Holidays	6
Getting In Touch	
Telephone	7
Internet	7
Postal services	7
Transport	7
Employment	
The job market	8
Income tax	8
Retirement	8
Business etiquette	8
Finance	
Currency	8
Cost of living	8
Banking	9
Cost of living chart	9
Health	
Private medical insurance	9
Emergencies	9
Health risks	9
Vaccinations	9





Quick facts¹

Capital: Bangkok

Population: 71 million

Major language: Thai

Major religion: Buddhism

Currency: Thai baht (THB)

Time zone: GMT +7

Emergency number: Police: 191; Tourist Police: 1155; Ambulance: 1554; Fire: 199

Electricity: 220V, 50 Hz. Plugs have two round pins or two flat blades.

Drive on the: Left

¹<http://www.expattarrivals.com/thailand/essential-info-for-thailand>

Overview

Thailand is known as the “Land of Smiles”, and with the excellent quality of life, low-cost living and friendly locals, expats moving to the country are sure to have plenty to smile about.

Whether moving to the fast-paced capital city of Bangkok for work, or retiring on one of Thailand’s peaceful islands, the country has much to offer – from exciting job opportunities in teaching and business to abundant natural beauty.

When it comes to accommodation, there’s a wide variety of options at a range of prices, and there are lots of good deals to be found. In addition, expats can rest assured that they’ll

be well cared for if they need medical attention in Thailand. Thanks to the country’s inexpensive but impressive quality of healthcare, Bangkok is an increasingly popular destination for medical tourism.

Though it can be tricky to adjust to the local culture, expats who make an effort to do so will be rewarded with a rich experience of Thailand and its fascinating traditions and beliefs. With this in mind, this guide has been compiled to offer expats a peek into life in Thailand. Read on to learn about the country’s climate, culture, working life and more.

Getting started

Climate and weather

Thailand enjoys a tropical climate and stays warm and humid year-round, though the year can still be divided into three distinct seasons. November to February is cool and dry, and the hot season is from March to June. June to October brings the rainy season which can also herald the arrival of monsoons and tropical storms.¹

Umbrellas are essential during the rainy season, especially in the southern regions of Thailand, where rainfall is especially heavy. In the hot season, precautions against heatstroke, dehydration and sunburn should be taken by drinking lots of water, staying indoors as much as possible, and using sunscreen.

¹<https://www.expatarrivals.com/asia-pacific/thailand/moving-thailand>

Visas

To visit Thailand for the short-term, a tourist visa is typically needed, but citizens of some countries are exempt from this requirement. Depending on their nationality, they'll be allowed to enter Thailand for up to 15, 30 or 90 days.

Expats who plan to work, do business or retire in Thailand will need a non-immigrant visa. For working and doing business, a B visa (along with a work permit) will most likely be needed, while retiring expats should apply for an O visa. Spouses of Thai citizens and foreigners volunteering in Thailand are also eligible for O visas.¹

Accommodation

Expats in Thailand are spoilt for choice when it comes to deciding on accommodation. In fact, with so many options – from condominium complexes and high-rise apartment blocks, to seaside [shacks] and standalone houses – it can be tough to narrow down the search.²

Because expat life in Thailand is often transient, most prefer to rent rather than buy. But those who do decide to buy property will need permanent residency status and must navigate the complex laws governing foreign ownership of property.

The quality of accommodation is hugely variable. Some offerings might not be up to Western standards, but if willing to be flexible, some excellent deals can be found.

It's a good idea to use a real estate agent to help sift through listings and navigate any language barriers [the landlord typically foots the bill for the agent]. Those who decide to go it alone will still have plenty of resources available in the form of online property portals and local newspaper listings.³

The practicalities of renting in Thailand aren't too complicated and it's not uncommon for rental agreements to be somewhat informal – though it's still better to get a real estate agent to draw up a basic lease agreement. The length of a lease and deposit policies tend to vary depending on the landlord.

Utilities such as water, electricity and telephone line are usually not included in the rental price.

Schools

As there are strict laws governing attendance of Thai public schools and expat parents will usually only have the option of sending their children to private or international schools. Both offer a good standard of education, and there are plenty to choose from – In 2017 Thailand had more than 3,700 private schools, around 200 of which are international schools. Most are in Bangkok, but there are also a number of options in Chiang Mai, Phuket, Chon Buri and Samut Prakan.

International schools offer a non-Thai curriculum, most often that of the UK, US or International Baccalaureate. The language of instruction is usually English, but schools that offer curricula from non-English speaking countries (such as Germany or France) usually teach in the language native to that country.

International schools usually have long waiting lists, and the admission process can be competitive. It's always best to get started as soon as possible to avoid being at the back of the queue. Fees at these schools also tend to be high, so if moving to Thailand for work, it's always worthwhile trying to negotiate an education allowance into the contract.

Expat parents whose budget doesn't stretch to international school fees should consider bilingual private schools instead. Teaching philosophies at these schools are becoming more Westernized and the standard of education they offer is generally good.⁴



¹ <https://www.thaiembassy.com/thailand-visa/thailand-visa-types>
² <http://www.expatarrivals.com/thailand/accommodation-in-thailand>
³ <https://www.thailandstarterkit.com/accommodation/bangkok-apartments/>
⁴ <https://iglu.net/international-schools-in-thailand/>

Culture

With the nickname of the “Land of Smiles”, it should go without saying that Thailand is a friendly and welcoming place. Locals are warm and hospitable, and they enjoy getting to know foreigners. However, living in Southeast Asia can still take some time to adjust to, and there are certain cultural differences that expats are likely to encounter, so it’s best to be prepared. Here are a few aspects of life in Thailand that differ from the West.

Language

The country’s official language is Thai. Although English is taught to Thai learners in school, proficiency in English outside of major cities remains low, and expats in rural areas may struggle to communicate if they don’t learn Thai. Even those in cities are likely to find that learning the language makes life a bit easier. Thai can be challenging to learn, especially as the meaning of words change according to one’s tone – but the delighted reactions of locals when a foreigner speaks Thai is well worth the difficulty of learning it.¹

Social etiquette and cultural faux pas

The concept of “face” and the importance of keeping face will play a central role in expats’ interactions with locals. “Face” is an intangible concept related to honor and reputation. Someone “loses face” when they’re belittled, embarrassed, contradicted or criticized by another person in public. Meanwhile, acting in a polite, inoffensive and considerate manner is a good way to keep or gain face. One can “save face” by reacting to a difficult situation with calm, dignity and acceptance instead of losing face by getting angry, upset, or admitting a personal shortcoming.²

When greeting in Thailand, expats should do so mindfully as this act is of great significance to locals. The social standing of both people determines the manner of greeting, and again, misjudging the situation and making the wrong move can cause a loss of face. However, if expats make an effort to greet correctly, it’s a good way to show respect for the Thai people.

The traditional Thai greeting is the wai – a prayer-like gesture made with a small bow. Hands are usually held in the chest area, but sometimes higher to show subordination. The subordinate party should be the first to offer a wai. Though foreigners aren’t expected to initiate a wai, it would be rude not to return one. Expats shouldn’t offer a wai to those with a lower social status, such as servers, children, street vendors and laborers. Doing so would cause embarrassment and loss of face to the person

being offered a wai. If such a person offers a wai, it shouldn’t be returned but rather acknowledged with a nod.³

Another aspect of showing respect for the locals in Thailand is to dress neatly and modestly. Both men and women should ensure that they don’t show too much skin. The dress code for office workers may also be more formal than what expats are used to.

Eating

Thailand is famous for the diverse and aromatic flavors that characterize its local cuisine, and experiencing authentic Thai food in person is sure to be a dream come true for foodies. Tom yam goong, pad Thai and green curry are just a few of the country’s most famous dishes and are easily found in local restaurants.⁴

That said, those craving a greasy burger or a cheesy pizza will be able to find many of the same fast-food chains they had access to back home, not to mention a number of local restaurants offering Western cuisine.

Locals often eat meals family-style, with communal dishes served to the group and everyone helping themselves. A fork and spoon are typically used to eat, with the spoon being the primary utensil. The fork is used to move food onto the spoon.⁵

Drinking

Drinking is acceptable in Thai culture, but is generally practiced in moderation to avoid any embarrassing situations that could cause one to lose face. As with many other aspects of Thai culture, locals like to share when drinking and are generous hosts. Often a communal bottle of liquor is shared among a group. Local beers are popular and wine is beginning to gain popularity too, although it’s usually expensive as it is imported. Although alcohol is typically easily available in Thailand, it can’t be purchased on national Buddhist faith holidays.⁶

Holidays

As Thailand is a majority Buddhist country, many of the national holidays are related to the Buddhist faith. Thais love to celebrate and expats should take the opportunity to join the festivities wherever possible.

¹ <http://www.commisceo-global.com/country-guides/thailand-guide>

² <https://www.pattayaunlimited.com/thailand-land-of-face/>

³ http://www.ediplomat.com/np/cultural_etiquette/ce_th.htm

⁴ <http://www.bangkok.com/food-top10.htm>

⁵ <https://importfood.com/features/thai-cooking-features/item/thai-eating-customs>

⁶ <https://www.tripsavvy.com/drinking-in-thailand-4006209>

Members of the royal family are important figures in Thailand, and days commemorating their birthdays or anniversaries of death should be respected and taken seriously.

New Year's Day – 1 January
Makha Bucha Day – February/March*
Chakri Memorial Day – 6 April
Songkran Festival – 13 to 15 April
Labor Day – 1 May
Vesakha Bucha Day – May/June*
Asahna Bucha Day – July*
His Majesty the King's Birthday – 28 July
Her Majesty the Queen's Birthday – 12 August
Passing of His Majesty the Late King – 13 October
Chulalongkorn Day – 23 October
His Majesty the Late King's Birthday – 5 December
Constitution Day – 10 December
New Year's Eve – 31 December

*Based on lunar calendar

Getting in touch

The ease of keeping in touch in Thailand will largely depend on where one lives. Signal for phone calls and internet connections can be patchy in rural areas, while urban areas should be relatively well-covered. The cost of setting up and maintaining internet is cheaper than in most countries.⁷

Telephone

Landline services are gradually becoming less popular in Thailand, with mobile usage being far more popular among locals and expats alike. Some people have fixed lines installed only in order to access the internet. Three companies provide fixed-line services in Thailand: Telephone Organization of Thailand (TOT), CAT Telephone, and True.

For mobile usage, expats will have the choice of setting up a pay-as-you-go or contract account with one of Thailand's three main mobile service providers – AIS, DTAC and True Move.⁸

Internet

The internet in Thailand is usually provided by an ADSL connection, and sometimes via broadband. In some areas, fiber or satellite internet may be an option. There are more than 30 service providers to choose from and it's a good idea to ask a local for recommendations of the best one.

Postal Services

State-owned Thailand Post is responsible for the country's postal service. Though generally reliable, it can take a long time for mail to reach its destination. Some postal office workers might not fully understand English.

Transport

Expats have many options for getting around in Thailand, though the process of getting from place to place can be a chaotic experience. Driving is an option, but many expats prefer to hire local drivers who know their way around. Otherwise, Thailand has a range of public transport options of varying quality and comfort, including buses, trains, motorcycles and taxis.

Trains are widely available but are largely seen as inefficient and ill maintained. However, expats in Bangkok will have the option of using the much faster and more comfortable Mass Rapid Transit system consisting of the metro, the BTS Skytrain and the Airport Rail Link. Buses are also available, although they can be a slow way to travel given the traffic congestion in cities.

Most Thai cities have taxis which are a useful way to get around. However, many of them don't have meters, so it's best to negotiate a price before getting into the car. Motorcycle taxis are also popular and their ability to weave through traffic means that they're faster than most other forms of transport, but these rides come with significant safety risks and are not recommended to expats.

Those who choose to drive in Thailand might find it a stressful or frustrating experience due to massive traffic volumes in cities and sometimes erratic driving styles.

For longer distances, air travel is ideal and can be affordable, thanks to a wide variety of budget airlines operating in Thailand. Air Asia is one of the most popular.

⁷ <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Thailand-Telecoms-Infrastructure-Operators-Regulations-Statistics-and-Analyses>

⁸ <https://thailandesim.com/mobile-operators/>

Employment

The job market

Though political instability has hampered the growth of Thailand's economy to some extent, it's still an attractive place to do business and there are several thriving industries. The industrial and service sectors make up the majority of the country's GDP, with trade, communication and agriculture also making significant contributions to the economy.¹ New arrivals moving to Thailand for work are most often employed in the service industry, usually in teaching or tourism jobs, or else doing business in corporate environments.

Income tax

The tax liability of expats in Thailand depends on their tax residency status. If expats are ordinarily resident in the country for half the year or more, they'll be classified as a tax resident and will be liable to pay tax on their worldwide income. Those who aren't tax residents will only have to pay income tax on their earnings from within Thailand.

Business etiquette

With a number of multinational companies using Bangkok as a base for regional operations, many expats move to Thailand for business purposes. Although the business culture within some of these companies may resemble that of offices in the West, in general, the Thai work environment can be quite different.

The Thai work environment is typically formal, though less so than in other Asian economic powerhouses like Japan and China. There's usually a noticeable hierarchy, and seniority is valued and respected. Personal relationships play an important role in business dealings, too. Local cultural customs like the concept of "face" should also be kept in mind, as they also apply to the business world.

Business dress is usually formal and conservative, particularly in corporate environments. For men, dark (but not black) suits with a tie and white shirt are commonly worn. Women should take care to dress modestly, and shoulders and knees should be covered.

Though the traditional greeting in Thailand is the wai, Westerners aren't expected to initiate one. Often, they'll find themselves being greeted with a handshake instead.

¹ http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Thailand/sub5_8g/entry-3314.html

² <http://www.thaiembassy.com/retire/retire.php>

The Thai communication style is often indirect to avoid losing face. This means that if locals disagree with something or notice someone else making a mistake, they won't point it out as doing so could negatively affect that person's reputation. They're also reluctant to offer a negative answer, so sometimes a "yes" might not indicate agreement, but is rather used to maintain harmony in the relationship by avoiding direct indications of disagreement.

Retirement

The tropical climate and laid-back lifestyle make the prospect of retiring in Thailand an appealing one, and many expats can be found enjoying their golden years in the country's coastal and island regions. To retire in Thailand, a category O visa is needed – specifically the subcategory OA, which is a long-stay retirement visa. To apply for this visa, expats must be 50 years or older and prove that they have sufficient finances to support themselves.²

Finance

Currency

Thailand's official currency is the Thai baht (THB), which is subdivided into 100 satang. Though satang coins are still legal tender, inflation has made them largely obsolete.

Money is available in the following denominations:

Notes: Notes: 20, 50, 100, 500 and 1,000 baht

Coins: 25 and 50 satang, and 1, 2, 5 and 10 baht

Cost of living

Though Thailand isn't generally an expensive place to live, some areas have a higher cost of living than others. Choosing to reside outside of the capital or in more rural areas can significantly reduce the cost of living.

Accommodation will often take up the bulk of an expat's salary, but with such a wide variation in rental prices, sometimes other expenses overtake this cost. That said, utilities can be pricey, especially electricity. Transport is cheap, while street-side vendors and markets make it easy to eat well on a budget.

International school fees can easily account for a large portion of one's salary, so it's wise to try to negotiate this cost into one's contract if relocating for work. For quality education at a lower price, expats may consider sending their children to a bilingual private school instead.

Banking

Managing finances in Thailand is relatively easy, and expats should be able to open a bank account and make transactions without much hassle.

Expats have the choice of banking with an international or local bank. Both are solid choices. When opening a bank account in Thailand, expats will usually need to present their passport and work permit. New arrivals might encounter a language barrier in rural areas, but banks in places with a significant foreign presence usually have English-speaking staff.⁶

Cost of Living Chart

Prices may vary depending on product and service provider. The list below shows average prices for Bangkok in August 2023.¹

Accommodation (monthly rent in good area)

Three-bedroom apartment in city center THB 62,400

Three-bedroom apartment outside city center
THB 32,400

Groceries

Eggs (dozen) THB 72 Milk (1 liter) THB 57

Loaf of white bread THB 58

Chicken breasts (1kg) THB 116

Eating out

Big Mac Meal THB 200 Coca-Cola (330ml) THB 20

Cappuccino THB 79 Bottle of local beer THB 80

3-course meal for two at a mid-range restaurant THB 1,000

Utilities

Mobile Phone Monthly Plan THB 496

Internet (average per month) THB 528

Basic utilities (per month for small apartment)
THB 3,000

Transportation

Taxi rate (per kilometer) THB 39.40

City center bus/train fare THB 44

Petrol/gasoline (per liter) THB 39

¹ <https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/in/Bangkok>

Health

The standard of public healthcare in Thailand is good, but long waiting times are common. Private healthcare is available at a relatively low cost, so most expats make use of this.

Private Medical Insurance

Expats are eligible for public health coverage in Thailand – in fact, employed expats are required to make social service contributions, along with their employer. Some find that coverage under public health insurance isn't comprehensive enough, or else prefer to use private healthcare services. Even though private healthcare is generally affordable, it's still preferable to be insured to cover costs.

Emergencies

Public ambulance response times can be slow and there may be language barriers, so it's best to contact one of the many private ambulance services that cater to English speakers. It's also possible to get an ambulance by calling a nearby private hospital.

Expats can dial 1154 for an ambulance or 1155 for the Tourist Police.

Health Risks

The tropical climate in Thailand results in several health concerns, including dengue fever and malaria. Outbreaks are more common in rural areas and preventative measures should be taken, such as using antimalarial medication.

Thailand's tap water isn't safe to drink and can harbor bacteria, so it's best to drink only filtered and purified water.

Vaccinations

There aren't any compulsory vaccinations required to enter the country, but it's recommended that routine vaccinations are kept up to date. Hepatitis A and typhoid vaccines are also recommended as it's possible to contract these illnesses through contaminated water in Thailand.⁷

⁶ <https://www.thailandstarterkit.com/money/thai-bank-accounts/>

⁷ <https://www.tmb.ie/destinations/vaccinations-for-thailand>