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# Welcome to Thailand

The Kingdom of Thailand lies in the heart of South East Asia. The shape and geography are divided into four distinct natural regions : the mountains and forests of the North; the vast rice fields of the Central Plains; the semi-arid farm lands of the Northeast plateau; and the tropical islands and long coastline of the peninsula South. The land of smiles is jam-packed full of excitement—from Temples and Buddhist monks to oriental dances, bustling markets, unique fauna and flora, exotic food, exciting nightlife, serene hills, virgin rainforests and charming island resorts.

Bangkok also offers a treasure trove of cultural attractions and an opportunity to experience a fascinating glimpse of Thailand's gentle culture amidst the bustle of a great and dynamic metropolis. 710 Years old, Chiang Mai, lies to the north and is more laidback than Bangkok but is still as captivating. The original city layout still exists as a neat square surrounded by a moat with vestiges of the fortified wall. Surrounded by lush mountainous terrain, the north is perfect for trekking and offers an insight into the local hill tribes. Of course, Thailand is blessed with some of the world's most-enviable islands and beaches with Phuket, Koh Samui and Koh Phi Phi ensuring your holiday in the south will be filled with water sports, hammocks and sunset strolls along the water edge. Some areas are busier whilst others offer a more serene experience – be sure to research your breakaway carefully.

## ▪ GETTING AROUND

It's affordable and easy to get around Thailand. Each of the hubs are serviced by scheduled air services and we are able to offer convenient and hassle free transfers from the airports to your hotel or resort. There are no shortages of taxis in the cities and Bangkok also offers the Skytrain as well as tuk-tuks and boats running up and down the Chao Phraya River. The island havens off the coast of Koh Samui and Phuket are accessible by ferries.

## ▪ CLIMATE

Thailand's tropical climate has three main seasons :

Hot : March to June

Rainy : July to October

Cool : November to February

Average temperatures range from 20°C to 35°C, with the weather being a little cooler in the north of the country.

The East and West coasts experience different monsoon seasons:

The Gulf of Thailand (East coast) = November to March

The Andaman Sea (West coast) = May to October

The monsoon rains are generally short and heavy, clearing quickly and days of constant rain are rare.

## ▪ LANGUAGE

The national language is Thai, although English is widely spoken in cities and larger towns.



#### ▪ PASSPORT & VISA INFORMATION

Visitors to Thailand require a valid passport (which must be valid for at least six months after one has RETURNED to South Africa and feature a minimum of four blank pages). South African passport holders do not require a visa for a maximum stay of 1 month; but it is advisable to check with the relevant Embassy before departure.

#### ▪ CURRENCY

The currency is the Thai Baht which is better for bargaining and shopping in markets. US Dollars, Pounds and Euros are accepted at hotels.

#### ▪ TIPPING

A service charge is already included in all prices. Tips, in general, are not mandatory, and you should only give them if you are really content with the service offered. Waiters, bellboys, porters, restroom attendants and taxi drivers will happily accept loose change.

#### ▪ TIME DIFFERENCE

Thailand is 5 hours ahead of South Africa.

#### ▪ FESTIVALS

Thailand boasts many festivals throughout the year, one of the most famous being the Songkran Festival in mid-April which washes away all the bad spirits and celebrates the traditional Thai New Year. Basically, Songkran is all about getting wet so be prepared to be squirted with ice water!

#### ▪ WHAT TO WEAR

Light, cool clothes are sensible. Shorts (except knee length walking shorts), sleeveless shirts, tank tops and other beach-style attire are considered inappropriate dress when not actually at the beach or in a resort area.

#### ▪ COMMON COURTESIES

It is important to show respect for the Thai Royal Family. Revealing attire is not allowed in religious shrines. Do not climb over or sit on Buddha monuments. Do not touch or give anything directly to a Buddhist monk if you are a woman. Thais greet each other by pressing their palms together called 'wai'. It is rude to touch people on their head or point your feet at people or an object.

#### ▪ ELECTRICITY

The electric current is 220 volts AC (50 cycles) and the majority of electrical outlets take a round, two-pronged slim plug.

#### ▪ HEALTH

Visitors do not require vaccinations unless coming from or passing through a designated contaminated area. Drink only bottled water and avoid ice unless you know is made from bottled or boiled water. Don't eat from the food vendors on the street, unless you are sure of their cleanliness and proper care must be taken against sunburn.

