



SAWASDEE

WELCOME TO THAILAND!

Thailand is often referred to as the 'Land of Smiles', and for good reason – most visitors truly have a great time and often return! Thailand has many different faces and certainly offers something more than just beach resorts (although the beach resorts are beautiful). The perception that the country has been discovered by mass tourism and is therefore not interesting is incorrect, as there are lots of off-the-beaten-track places that are seldom visited by foreign tourists. It is also a country with a very rich culture, stunning natural wonders, great infrastructure and friendly people that enjoy conversing with foreign visitors.





GEOGRAPHY

Thailand's 513,120 square kilometers lie in the middle of mainland Southeast Asia. The fertile floodplains and tropical monsoon climate means the central part of the country is ideally suited to wet-rice (thamna) cultivation, and it was this that attracted settlers to the region. By the 11th century AD, a number of loosely connected rice-growing and trading states flourished in the upper Chao Phraya Valley. They broke free from domination of the Khmer Empire, but from the middle of the 14th century gradually came under the control of the Ayutthaya kingdom at the southern extremity of the floodplain. Successive capitals, built at various points along the Chao Phraya River, became the centers of great Thai kingdoms based on rice cultivation and foreign commerce. Unlike the neighboring Khmer and Burmese, the Thais continued to look outward across the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea toward foreign ports of trade.

When European imperialism introduced a new phase to Southeast Asian commerce in the late 1800s, Thailand (known then as Siam) was able to maintain its independence as a buffer zone between British-controlled Burma to the west and French-dominated Indochina to the east – however the country lost over 50% of its territory in the process. Most of the areas lost contained a non-Thai population (Khmer, Lao or Shan), while the Thai-speaking heartland remained intact.

The most conspicuous features of Thailand's terrain are high mountains, a central plain, and an upland plateau. Mountains cover much of northern Thailand and extend along the Myanmar border down through the Kra Isthmus and the Malay Peninsula. The central plain is a lowland area drained by the Chao Phraya River and its tributaries; this is the country's principal river system, which feeds into the delta at the head of the Bay of Bangkok. The Chao Phraya system drains about one-third of the nation's territory.

In the northeastern part of the country, the Khorat Plateau – a region of gently rolling low hills and shallow lakes – drains into the Mekong through the Mun River. The Mekong system empties into the South China Sea and includes a series of canals and dams. Together, the Chao Phraya and Mekong systems sustain Thailand's agricultural economy by supporting wet-rice cultivation and providing waterways for the transport of goods and people.

In contrast, the distinguishing natural features of peninsular Thailand are long coastlines, offshore islands, and diminishing mangrove swamps.

FAST FACTS

OFFICIAL NAME

Kingdom of Thailand

CAPITAL CITY

Bangkok

BOUNDARIES

Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia

CURRENCY

Baht

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Thai

POPULATION

69.04 million

TOTAL AREA

513,120 km²

PEOPLE

The Thai people, formerly known as Siamese, are the main ethnic group of Thailand and are part of the larger Tai ethno linguistic peoples found in Thailand and adjacent countries in Southeast Asia as well as southern China. Their language is the Thai language, which is classified as part of the Tai-Kadai family of languages, and the majority of Thai are followers of Theravada Buddhism.

The term “Thai people” is used when referring to all Thai ethnic groups, however sometimes it also refers to the population of Thailand in general. The Thais can be broken down into various regional groups; these groups include Central Thai (also the standard variety of the language), Isan (more closely related to the Standard Lao of Laos than to Standard Thai), Lanna Thai (Northern Thailand) and Southern Thai. Modern Central Thai has become more dominant due to official government policy, which was designed to assimilate and unify the disparate Thai in spite of ethno linguistic and cultural ties between the northeastern Thai people and the people from Laos for example.

The modern Thai are predominantly Theravada Buddhist and strongly identify their ethnic identity with their religious practices; these include aspects of ancestor worship, among other beliefs of the ancient folklore of Thailand. Indigenous arts include muay Thai (kick boxing), Thai dance, makruk (Thai Chess), and nang yai (shadow play).

Food also plays a very important part in Thai society. The fact that the standard greeting is ‘Have you eaten yet?’ (Gin Khao Liyang) says a lot!

THAILAND DESTINATIONS

BANGKOK

Before we delve into the numerous tourist attractions this city has to offer, let’s take a look at the region’s interesting history.

The capital and most populous city of Thailand, Bangkok is known in Thai as Krung Thep Maha Nakhon, although this is the “short version”. An interesting fact is that the official name of Bangkok is the longest in the world, acknowledged by the Guinness Book of Records!

Bangkok traces its roots to a small trading post during the Ayutthaya Kingdom in the 15th century, which eventually grew in size and became the site of two capital cities: Thonburi in 1768 and Rattanakosin in 1782. Bangkok was at the heart of Siam’s (as Thailand used to be known) modernization during the later 19th century, as the country faced pressures from the West. The city was the centre stage of Thailand’s political struggles throughout the twentieth century, as the country abolished absolute monarchy and underwent numerous coups and uprisings. The city grew rapidly during the 1960s through the 1980s, and now exerts a significant impact among Thailand’s politics, economy, education, media and modern society.

Despite its traffic congestion, Bangkok is an amazing city with many reasons to visit. For a city of this size, it is surprisingly full of quiet escapes; step out of the street noise and into the calm of one of the city’s 400 wats (temple monasteries) or take a river taxi on the Chao Phraya River.

It is affordable, while at the same time providing excellent standards – and that goes for food as well as entertainment. It is one of the safest capital cities of any Asian country, a trait



that is in line with the rest of Thailand.

Bangkok’s multi-faceted sights, attractions and city life appeal to diverse groups of tourists. Royal palaces and temples, as well as several museums, constitute its major historical and cultural tourist attractions. Shopping and dining experiences offer a wide range of choices and prices, and the city is also famous for its dynamic nightlife.

Among Bangkok’s well-known sights are the Grand Palace and major Buddhist temples, including Wat Phra Kaew, Wat Pho, and Wat Arun. The Giant Swing and Erawan Shrine demonstrate Hinduism’s deep-rooted influence in Thai culture. Vimanmek Mansion in Dusit Palace is famous as the world’s largest teak building, while the Jim Thompson House provides an example of traditional Thai architecture. Other major museums include the Bangkok National Museum and the Royal Barge National Museum. Cruises and boat trips on the Chao Phraya and Thonburi’s canals offer views of some of the city’s traditional architecture and ways of life on the waterfront.

Shopping venues, many of which are popular with tourists and locals, range from the shopping centers and department stores concentrated in Siam and Ratchaprasong, to the sprawling Chatuchak Weekend Market. Taling Chan Floating Market is among the few such markets in Bangkok. Yaowarat, China Town, is known for its shops as well as street-side food stalls and restaurants, which are also found throughout the city. Khao San Road, Banglumpoo, has long been famous as a backpackers’ destination, with its budget accommodation, shops and bars attracting visitors of all languages and races.

BANGKOK

However, especially during the last couple of years, efforts have been made to spruce up this 'backpacker' image. Several nicer looking restaurants, small shopping malls, stylish pubs and even some clubs have appeared on the scene. This effect has spread to some of the streets in the near vicinity of Khao San Road as well, especially Rambuttree and Phra Athit Roads.

When you visit Bangkok, you won't have to worry about finding a place to sleep. The city has an enormous amount of hotels, resorts, guesthouses, bungalows, motels, serviced apartments, homestay opportunities, youth hostels, lodge houses and more. There are plenty of options to choose from!



BEYOND BANGKOK

The world around Bangkok is as fascinating as the capital itself. The most popular destination outside Bangkok is probably Pattaya, which is beginning to shed its sleazy image and reinvent itself as a family-oriented destination. The area's night time antics, however, remain.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the tranquility and peace of Kanchanaburi and its claim to fame: the movie 'Bridge over the River Kwai'. Whatever your taste is, it's all worth exploring.

Amphawa, 63km west of Bangkok, is home to a quaint floating market that cuts through a small but vibrant community of vintage shop-houses.

Ayutthaya Historical Park – a UNESCO World Heritage Site just a 2-hour drive from Bangkok – is the most visited site in the area. Here, the four spectacular temples of the early Ayutthaya period (1350 – 1529) stand amongst a dense canopy of ancient trees. Apart from touring Ayutthaya's history and temples, your visit can be filled with modern cultural additions such as the Ayodha Floating Market, Krirk Yoonpan's Million Toys Museum, Ayutthaya Boat Museum or the Bang Sai Royal Folk Art and Crafts Centre.

Khao Yai National Park's forests are teeming with wildlife and birds. Look up and down and from side to side, tread

softly, and listen carefully to discover the real inhabitants of the forest. Gibbons provide an excellent morning wake-up call with their mournful hoots. Quiet, patient walkers may catch a glimpse of these tree-living apes. Macaques are often seen on the roadsides. Elephants are sometimes spotted at salt licks or on the road in the evenings and on the very rare occasion tourists may spot a tiger in the grasslands at dusk. Civets, squirrels, porcupines, and wild pigs add a bit of variety. Snakes and lizards usually make their presence known by a rustle in the undergrowth as you are walking. If you see a snake, treat it as dangerous unless you know otherwise! Geckos are frequently seen catching insects on building walls and ceilings, while cicadas never stop their distinct chorus. Look up and down and from side to side to spot the real movers and shakers in the forest – the insects and invertebrates. When it comes to birds, there are lots – over 320 species have been recorded. To the non-expert, birds are often just mysterious whistles, trills and calls, or a flutter of wings and a glimpse of color. Flying hornbills are usually heard before seen; the sound of their large wings flapping is quite loud! Bats are also well represented: nearly 1 million insect eating bats live in a cave on the edge of the park.

CHIANG MAI

Founded in 1296, Chiang Mai is Thailand's second-largest city and the gateway to the country's north. You can still see the moat that encircled the original city, and there are 300 wats, including Wat Chiang Man (home of the 1800-year-old 10cm-high Crystal Buddha), Wat Phra Singh (built in the classic northern-Thai style) and Wat Chedi Luang (partially ruined by earthquake, cannon fire and recent restoration efforts).

15km west of the city and 1,156m above sea level on Suthep Mountain, Wat Doi Suthep overlooks the city from its forested backdrop. Dating back to 1383, it's one of Chiang Mai's most important landmarks and has holy Buddha relics in its golden pagoda. To reach it one can choose the hard way and climb a steep Naga staircase comprising around 300 steps, while the less energetic may ascend by funicular cars. From here one can have fine views of the city.

The Old Chiang Mai Cultural Centre was set up over 25 years ago to preserve and promote the history and culture of the ancient northern kingdom of Lan Na, its royal tradition of dances and music, its unique food and the folk art of the people of the valleys and of the hill tribes. Compared to Bangkok, Chiang Mai's evenings are cool and conducive to browsing around the central Night Bazaar. To get value for money, bargain patiently, but keep things in perspective.

PHUKET

Phuket, which is somewhat smaller than the size of Singapore, is Thailand's largest island. It is situated off the west coast of Thailand in the Andaman Sea and connected to mainland Thailand by two bridges. Phuket formerly derived its wealth from tin and rubber, and enjoys a rich and colorful history. The region now derives much of its income from tourism.

One of the most popular (and overcrowded) tourist areas on Phuket is Patong Beach on the central western coast, perhaps owing to the easy access to its wide and long beach. Most of Phuket's nightlife and its cheap shopping is located in Patong, and the area has become increasingly developed. Other popular beaches are located south of Patong, such as Karon Beach, Kata Beach, Kata Noi Beach, and around the southern tip of the island at Nai Harn Beach and Rawai. To the north of Patong are Kamala Beach, Surin Beach and Bang Tao Beach. These areas are generally much less developed than Patong, and sought out by individuals, families and other groups with a preference for more relaxed and less crowded environs than Patong. There are many islands to the southeast, including Bon Island, just a short boat trip away. There are several coral islands to the south of Phuket; the Similan Islands lie to the northwest, and Phi Phi Islands to the southeast. All islanders engage in a lively tourist trade, catering to snorkelers and scuba divers in particular.



INSIDER'S PICK

"In Phuket Town, you can join the Phuket Old Town Discovery Walk. This walk is all about learning the local lifestyle. You'll go to the local shrine and pay respect to the spirits, visit the 'oldest herb shop' in town and learn about the medicinal use of herbs, walk along historic Chinese shop houses in the beautiful streets of Thalang and Soi Romanee, and visit the old style barber hair dressing shop. You will try Muslim influenced roti and some Chinese food as well, which was brought to Phuket Town by the Hokkien immigrants in the 19th century. Phuket Town is an amazingly authentic place and the Discovery Walk is a great way to experience the local lifestyle and the very relaxing atmosphere!"



KOH SAMUI

Koh Samui, or often simply Samui as it is referred to by locals, is an island off the east coast of the Kra Isthmus in Thailand. It is located close to the mainland town of Surat Thani.

Until the late 20th century, Koh Samui was an isolated self-sufficient community, having little connection with the mainland of Thailand. The island was even without roads until the early 1970s, and the 15 km journey from one side of the island to the other could involve a whole-day trek through the mountainous central jungles.

Koh Samui is based primarily on a successful tourist industry, as well as exports of coconut and rubber. The central part of the island consists of an almost uninhabitable tropical jungle mountain called Khao Pom, peaking at 635m. The various lowland and coastal areas are connected by a single 51 km road, running mostly along the coastline and encircling the bulk of the island.

Chaweng Beach, on the eastern side of the island, is probably the most popular with nearly every visitor coming to see Chaweng at least once during their holiday. Chaweng offers hundreds of shops, restaurants, resorts and entertainment venues over a 5-kilometer beachside stretch of golden sand. The other primary tourist beaches and beach communities are Lamai Beach on the southeast of the island, Bophut Beach (Fisherman's Village) on the northeast side of the island and Maenam Beach in the north. These beaches provide a wide variety of accommodation, from the original and now almost extinct beach bungalows, to modern and very ambitious 5-star resorts and almost everything in-between.

More recently, the less crowded western side of the island has seen the development of many 5-star hotels and resorts that have chosen this side of the Island as their home. This vast array of style, price and location provides a myriad of options that continues to attract tourists of every age and demographic, from all over the world.

KRABI

Krabi is a southern province on Thailand's Andaman seaboard with perhaps the country's oldest history of continued settlement.

Much of the province consists of several national parks. The topmost destinations are Hat Noppharat Thara, Ao Nang, Railay and Ko Phi Phi National Park. However, there are over 80 smaller islands, such as the Lanta islands (Ko Lanta) and Phi Phi islands, which have been made famous as the ideal location for adventurers, yachtsmen, scuba divers, snorkelers and day-trippers from Phuket.

The Ko Lanta National Park, also in Krabi province, includes several coral-fringed islands with well-known diving sites. The largest island, Ko Lanta Yai, is the site of park headquarters, and is also home to Chao Le, or sea gypsies, who sustain themselves largely through fishing. The islands are best visited during the non-monsoon months of October through April.

Kayaking, sailing, bird watching and snorkeling are also among the top activities. In the interior, two predominantly mainland national parks, Khao Phanom Bencha and Than Bokk-horani, offer inland scenic attractions including waterfalls and caves, and opportunities for trekking, birdwatching and eco-tours.

The rock faces at Railay Beach near Ao Nang have attracted climbers from all over the world and are the venue for the Rock and Fire Festival each year. There are several rock climbing schools at Railay beach.



KHAO SOK

Khao Sok National Park in Southern Thailand is an amazing place. It is perfectly situated on the mainland between Phuket, Krabi, Khao Lak and Koh Samui, which are the most popular destinations in southern Thailand. It is a fantastic place to go on vacation. Elephant trekking, trekking on foot, canoeing and jeep safaris are all possible activities that will give you the experience of a lifetime. One of the most interesting areas is the stunningly beautiful Cheow Larn Lake in the heart of the National Park with its floating raft houses and luxury tents.

If you're planning to visit Thailand and would like to know more about the aforementioned destinations – or any other destinations in this beautiful country – don't hesitate to ask the experts at Khiri Travel. We're more than happy to provide you with the information you need to plan the perfect Thai getaway!

NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATIONS PER REGION

(by Asian Tourism Guide)

Region	No of accommodations
Bangkok	680
Central (excl. Bangkok)	511
Wes	1,688
East	1,434
Northeast	1,733
North	2,659
South	3,662

AVERAGE ROOM RATE IN BAHT

(by Bank of Thailand)

Region	Price
Total	1,747.10
Central (incl. Bangkok)	1,678.91
South	2,210.06
North	1,655.96
Northeast	874.88

KHIRI PREFERRED HOTELS

1. *Hotel Riva Surya*, Bangkok
2. *137 Pillar House*, Chiang Mai
3. *Memory at On On*, Phuket
4. *Anantara Lawana*, Samui
5. *Tubkaak Boutique Resort*, Krabi

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