

## About Thailand

The Kingdom of Thailand has the greatest number of visitors to its shores than any other country in south-east Asia. It is renowned for its laid back smiling hospitality, splendid temples, magnificent cuisine and its fabulous ancient kingdoms. In addition, its radiant natural beauty provides scenery that can only be described as jaw dropping to those who love the outdoors.

From the northern provinces of Chiang Mai and its surrounding villages to the mountains of Mae Hong Son down to the islands on the Andaman Sea, the pulse racing night life of Bangkok, and the tranquilly along the Mekong River, Thailand offers something to all kinds of travellers.

### Early History

The Mons were believed to be the earliest civilization in central Thailand who brought with them the Buddhist culture from the Indian Subcontinent. The first Siamese capital was created by Thai princes in Sukhothai and later similar colonies formed in Chiang Mai and Ayutthaya.

### Modern History

The 20th century saw great change in Thailand when in 1932 it converted the country into a constitutional monarchy. When World War II started the Thai government sided with the Japanese. After the war, the country was military run with repeated coups and countercoups. Finally, in 1979 democratic elections were held that established a strong government and a long period of stability and prosperity began as the power moved from the military to the business academics.

### Population

Thailand, formally the Kingdom of Siam, named itself Thailand on 11th May 1949. The word Thai in the Thai language means 'freedom' and so Thailand effectively means 'Land of the free'. Thailand is a farming dependant economy slowly making a steady transition from its agricultural past to a mixed industrial based economy.

The last statistics taken officially in 2003 saw the population of Thailand at 63.5 million and is estimated to be rapidly heading towards a figure of 70 million by the year 2010. The demographics of this are that 50% of this future population will be between 0 and 30 years old.

Thailand's main religion is Buddhism, practiced by over 85% of the population. To the south belong communities of Muslims that make up a further 7% with a small Christian community of around 3%.

### Events and Festivals

Here is where the country truly expresses its own identity and individuality. Through various stages of the year many rituals and festivals take place. These can mainly be linked with agriculture or the Buddhist religion and the lunar calendar. Remember the Buddhist lunar calendar tells the world it is 2551 this year and not 2008 as we all see it in Europe, the Americas and Australasia!

New Year/Songkran is celebrated in mid April, by 'bathing', this comes in many manifestations from monks sprinkling water over their hands to general water throwing in the air for fun. Expect to be soaked or simply don't go out!

The Rocket festival every June in the North East of Thailand fires copious amounts of fireworks into the sky all in the desire of asking for rain to come for the new rice season. Volatile mixtures of bamboo and gun powder are sent up to convince the sky to bring down the heavens in terms of rain.

The Vegetarian festival every October takes place mainly in Phuket and Trang. This particular part of Thailand is home to many of the Chinese Buddhists. For nine days it is celebrated by only eating vegetarian food and beautiful merit making processions through the local communities.

The Elephant Round up takes place in Surin province every November. Many people say if you want to see the next elephant (Chang) &David Beckham& play football this is the place. But this tradition is much more than this as it gives thanks to the creatures that have over the years created a Kingdom and a love that makes Thailand so unique. The elephants you see at this festival are in the main genuine workers and you only have to walk into a public building or two to recognize their significance to the local provinces when you see the huge artworks of them hanging on the walls.

The Loi Krathong festival around November also sees candle lit floats cast onto waterways to bring good fortune for the coming year.

### Wining and Dining

In the past decade in Bangkok and its major tourism destinations a highly competitive market has come of age in terms of feeding the pallets of the world. Thailand on its own boasts award winning cuisine, but when now balanced with invited chefs, fusion foods and the &ldquo;full-on&rdquo; availability of international dishes from nearly every place on the planet, dinning out, day or night becomes an accommodated joy available to the masses at generally the right prices. Indeed you can sit and dine at an open restaurant or pavement stall like a king at a fraction of what it would cost in London or New York.

### The Weather

The weather is different from the north to the south of the country but generally in the northern regions it behaves as follows:

Dry season is from December till late April. From May till August during monsoon season it can rain intermittently, and from September to November high winds can be experienced. September and October tend to see the heaviest rain fall but this can vary from season to season depending on weather front change

In the Southern regions dry season if from February till late June. July till October during the south west monsoon it can rain intermittently, and from October to January high winds can be experienced due to the north east monsoon season. October and November tend to see the heaviest rain fall but this can vary from season to season depending on the weather fronts in Malaysia at the time

### Travelling

Coming to Thailand has never been easier. Generally speaking a sixty day visa is readily available. However for those of us who wish to stay long term there are various options open to achieve this. Retirement Visas and Non Immigrant Visas are also available for those who wish to stay longer.