

In Thailand

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CHAPTER 4

Learning about Thailand



Welcome to the “Land of Smiles”! Thailand is an amazing kingdom, featuring Buddhist temples, exotic wildlife, and spectacular islands. Along with a fascinating history and a unique culture, Thailand features a modern capital city and friendly people.

Officially known as the Kingdom of Thailand and formerly as Siam, Thailand is a country at the center of the Indochinese peninsula in Mainland Southeast Asia. It is bordered to the north by Myanmar and Laos, to the east by Laos and Cambodia, to the south by the Gulf of Thailand and Malaysia, and to the west by the Andaman Sea and the southern extremity of Myanmar.

With a total area of approximately 513,000 km² (198,000 sq mi), Thailand is the world's 51st-largest country. It is the 20th-most-populous country in the world, with around 66 million people. The capital and largest city is Bangkok, which is Thailand's political, commercial, industrial, and cultural hub. The country's official language is Thai.

Thailand is divided into 76 provinces (changwat), which are gathered into five groups of provinces by location: north, northeast, central, east and south. Bangkok is at provincial level and thus often counted as a province. Each province is divided into districts (amphoe) and the districts are further divided into sub-districts (tambons).

Climate

Most of Thailand has a "tropical wet and dry or savanna climate" type. The south and the eastern tip of the east have a tropical monsoon climate. Countrywide, temperatures normally range from an average annual high of 38 °C (100.4 °F) to a low of 19 °C (66.2 °F). During the dry season, the temperature rises dramatically in the second half of March, spiking to well over 40 °C (104 °F) in some areas by mid-April when the sun passes its zenith.

Southern Thailand has a tropical monsoon climate. Temperatures are from very warm to hot throughout the year with only minor variations. It is either dry or wet season in Hat Yai. The dry season is from January-April, which is the hottest month of the year, and wet season is from May-December. There may be some especially heavy rainfalls from October to December.

Immigration Procedures



Before entering Thailand, a foreign student is required to obtain a Non-immigrant “Ed” Visa from the Royal Thai Embassy or Royal Thai Consulate-General in their own country. This visa must be extended every year at the related Immigration Office in Thailand.

Currently, Hat Yai Immigration officers come to PSU Hat Yai Campus to assist foreigners with necessary immigration affairs usually on the last Wednesday of each month at the President’s Office Building.



The regular immigration procedures for foreign students in Thailand are: One-year Visa Extension (every year), 90-day Report (90 days) and Re-entry Permit (before traveling outside Thailand).



Getting Started

PSU foreign staff and students must notify their residence (“Notification for Owner of Residence where Alien has Stayed” / TM. 30) to local immigration authorities within 24 hours after the first arrival in Thailand:

- For students staying at the PSU International Dormitory, the PSU International Affairs Office will provide the TM. 30 form filled-in for the students, but the international affairs officers of their faculty will accompany students to Immigration Office for notifying the authorities. Please attach to the TM. 30 form the following documents: copies of passport, current visa and departure card.
- The faculty can notify the residence for their students [online](#) or in person at Hat Yai Immigration Office.
- For staff and students staying outside the campus, the owner of the apartment, guesthouse, landlord or hotel manager accommodating foreign nationals legally on a temporary basis, must fill in the TM. 30 form and provide them with a copy of his/her national ID card, along with a copy of the house registration book, both signed by the owner. The International Affairs officer of their faculty has to accompany staff/ students to Hat Yai Immigration Office.
- Upon notification, foreign staff/students will receive a Receipt of Notification. This receipt must be presented for the one-year visa extension.

One-year Visa Extension

After entering Thailand with a Non-immigrant Education Visa (category “Ed”), international students are required to apply for an extension of stay at the related Immigration Office before the expiry date of their current visa.

- one can submit the documents not more than 45 days in advance. If the one-year visa expires, there is a fine of 500 Baht per day, but not exceeding 20,000 Baht in total. May also be banned from entering the country for a certain number of days.
- application must be made in person.





90-day Report

As a foreigner staying in Thailand for a period longer than 90 days and holding a Non-Immigrant Visa, you are required by the Thai Immigration to report your current address every 90 days. You must file this report within 15 days before or seven days after your 90-day-period expires. However, if you leave Thailand anytime during the 90-day period, then the day-count will restart from one upon your re-entry into Thailand.

- there is no fee for this report;
- one can submit the documents even 15 days in advance or seven days after the expiry date; if not, he/she will be fined 2,000 Baht.



Re-entry Permit

Foreign citizens holding a single Non-immigrant “Ed” Visa and planning to travel abroad, must obtain a Re-entry Permit before their departure, otherwise their visa will be invalidated and they will have to go through the whole process of getting the proper visa at a Thai Embassy or Consulate outside Thailand. The Re-entry Permit must be obtained from the Immigration Office before leaving Thailand.

- the re-entry visa can be available for one year, but no more than the availability of one’s current one-year visa;
- application must be made in person.

For the list of all necessary documents and to download the official forms, please see the [PSU International Affairs Office website](#).

For more information regarding visas in Thailand, please visit the website of the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Thailand](#) and the [Thai Immigration Bureau](#).

❖ Adjusting to your new environment

Once in Thailand, you may find out that many things are very different from what you are used to in your home country and it may take some time to adjust. Learning about a new culture can be fascinating and it is probably one of the reasons that you chose to study at PSU. You are welcome to contact the [International Students and Staff Office](#) if you encounter any adjustment difficulties.

Culture Shock

Every culture is unique and has its own types of acceptable behavior. Many difficulties and frustrations may arise when people try to integrate into a new culture. Culture shock may occur when foreigners feel excessively homesick, bored, or withdrawn from their primary countries of residence. Upon first arrival in Thailand, most foreigners will probably experience some degrees of culture shock.

Even with adequate preparation, culture shock may be impossible to prevent. The best advice is to be patient. Overcoming it takes time, but experiences will ultimately broaden your perspective and help you grow and get accustomed to the new environment.

The [International Students and Staff Office team](#) can help make your adjustment easier. Here are some strategies that have worked for other international students:

1. Take your time

Give yourself lots of time to accomplish the things you need to do. You will find it easier and less stressful if you do not try to complete too many tasks in one day.



2. Get some rest

Make sure to get enough sleep, especially during your first days in Thailand. Travel is tiring and, depending on where you have travelled from, you may experience fatigue or “jet lag”.

Try your best to sleep and wake up during regular hours in your new environment so that your body can adjust.

3. Eat a good meal

Experiment with food slowly. New food can upset your stomach, so try to continue to eat some of the foods that you are used to during your first weeks in Thailand. Drink only bottled water or drinking water from the water disposals available around campus. Tap water is usually not fit for consumption, except after boiling. There are many international food stores and restaurants on campus and around Hat Yai city.

4. Call home

Call, email or write to your family and friends. If you keep in touch with people at home, you will feel less homesick.

5. Ask questions

If you are unsure about something, ask someone. People are generally very willing to help, and when you ask questions you learn things more quickly and that will make your transition smoother.

Remember, you can always speak to an International Affairs officer about anything: we’re here to help.

6. Get out of the house

Get involved and meet people. International students say that this is the best way to adjust to a new culture. You will find that there are many things to do on campus, such as sports at the [Sport Complex](#). Playing sports is a great way to meet people. The [International Students Association](#) also supports and organizes activities for the international students at PSU.

Thai culture

Thai culture has been shaped by many influences, including Indian, Lao, Burmese, Cambodian, and Chinese. The official calendar in Thailand is based on the Eastern version of the Buddhist Era (BE), which is 543 years ahead of the Gregorian (Western) calendar. Thus the year 2020 is 2563 BE in Thailand.

Thai greeting

The Thai greeting, referred to as the *wai*, consists of a slight bow, with the palms pressed together in a prayer-like fashion. The higher the hands are held in relation to the face and the lower the bow, the more respect or reverence the giver of the *wai* is showing.



The *wai* is generally offered first by the younger of the two people meeting, with their hands pressed together, fingertips pointing upwards as the head is bowed to touch face to fingertips, usually coinciding with the spoken words “*sawatdi khrap*” for male speakers, and “*sawatdi kha*” for females. The elder may then respond in the same way.

Waiing remains to this day an extremely important part of social behavior among Thais, who are very sensitive to their self-perceived standing in society. Foreign tourists and other visitors unaccustomed to the intricacies of Thai language and culture should not *wai* someone younger than them except in return for their *wai*. However, one should always return a *wai* that is offered as a sign of respect.

As with other Asian cultures, respect towards ancestors is an essential part of Thai spiritual practice. Thais have a strong sense of hospitality and generosity, but also a strong sense of social hierarchy. Seniority is paramount in Thai culture. Elders have by tradition ruled in family decisions or ceremonies. Older siblings have duties to younger ones.

Taboos in Thailand include touching someone's head or pointing with the feet, as the head is considered the most sacred and the foot the lowest part of the body.

Attention & Questions

Unless you are of Asian ancestry, you will be easily recognizable as a foreigner. Caucasians in Thailand are collectively known as “farang” (meaning westerners). In some rural areas, seeing a foreigner in the flesh is a fairly uncommon situation, and you may, therefore, attract a considerable amount of attention and curiosity.

Some Thais will seize the opportunity to practice their English skills, and they may surprise you with unexpected greetings. Unfortunately their English competency is often limited and you could expect somewhat coarse greetings, such as, “Hey you!”, “You, you, you” or “Where you go?”. These greetings are not meant to be offensive, so a simple smile and a “Hello” are suitably appropriate responses.

On occasion, Thais may attempt more personal questions regarding your age, salary or marital status. If these questions become too intrusive, merely smile and tell them that it is a secret. Thailand is, after all, the “Land of Smiles.”

Displaying Emotion

Thais are culturally inclined to promote social harmony, and they could go to inordinate lengths to avoid any sort of personal conflict. Thais will also tend to be subtler about expressing a difference of opinion. It will often be voiced in such an indirect, non-confrontational manner that you may wonder what point they are trying to make. Within western cultures, many tend to openly show feelings of anger or impatience. In the context of Thai culture, though, it is considered impolite to display such negative emotion.

An important social concept throughout Asia is that of “saving face”. The intricacies of this concept are far beyond the scope of this booklet, but you should at least be aware of its existence. Thais place tremendous importance on being considerate, especially when it comes to “saving face”. If, for example, a waiter or waitress brought a Thai an iced tea instead of the ordered iced coffee, the Thai would probably choose to drink it rather than embarrass the server by sending it back.



Physical Contact

Although behavioral expressions have become more liberal in recent years, holding hands is the only acceptable form in public of physical contact between members of the opposite sex. Anything further may be perceived to be in bad taste and may give a negative impression.

However, it is quite common to see Thai females holding hands or walking with their arms around each other. It is not as common for Thai men, but they do come into contact with each other beyond what many male westerners feel comfortable with. This by no means gives any indication about their sexual orientations, but instead, it is merely a common display of friendship in Thailand.

Although Thailand does have an infamous sex industry, this is not an accurate reflection of the sexual morals of the average Thai females. On the contrary, Thai females are very conservative, and males should be careful to avoid incidental contact with Thai women unless they are close personal friends.



Social Hierarchy

In the past, Thai society was rigidly structured, and one's social hierarchy was determined primarily by one's status in society. While things have changed in recent times, Thais still place a great significance on one's position based on age, occupation, education, and wealth. Foreigners should be aware of a few guidelines in relation to this.

The most respected members of Thai society are the King and His Royal family. You should NEVER make any disparaging or unflattering remarks about the Thai Royal family even in jest. To do so would be considered a grave insult not only to the Royal family, but also to Thailand and its people. *Lèse Majesté* is a matter that Thai people take it very seriously.

Thailand is a religious country, and Buddhist monks are shown great respect in Thai society. Women should maintain a comfortable distance between themselves and monks because monks are forbidden to come into contact with women.

Teachers, particularly university professors, are also highly placed and are usually addressed by the title of "Ajarn", meaning professor.

Foreigners are automatically granted a high level of status, as they are often regarded as guests. It is, however, incumbent upon foreigners to behave in a fashion that shows they are deserving of this generous respect.

Homestay Tips

Boarding with a Thai family will unquestionably provide a unique experience. A few tips are mentioned below, which should help make staying with a Thai family a rewarding experience.

* Your Thai family may not seem as outwardly expressive as your family back home, especially with regards to negative emotion. Although they may pay you compliments without hesitation. When they have differences of opinion or disapproval of something, the signs may be expressed so subtly that you might not realize the true message. For example, if you return home rather late in the evening, your host family may comment the next day that you must be tired. They will let you know that they noticed, but they most likely will not tell you to come home sooner.

* Complaining about things is generally considered to be impolite. Thais also tend to take criticism more personally than westerners, so any negative comment should be softened or made as indirect as possible. On the contrary, you should also be careful of saying that you really like something when shopping with your host family; the Thai sense of generosity may cause them to feel obliged to purchase it for you. If you are given a gift, graciously accept it and try to be equally generous at a future point in time.

* When dining out in Thailand, it is customary for the most senior person in the group (either in age or status) to pay for everyone. If someone offers to pick up the bill, you should accept their generosity even if it compromises your own cultural beliefs.

* Staying with a host family should not be viewed as a boarding house situation. Thai host families consider it an honor and a privilege to take in foreign students. Your host family will think of you as a member of the family. Therefore, you should behave appropriately in accord with the family's expectations.

* You should be aware that a Thai host family might be over-protective at times. Although most university students in Thailand are young adults, they are still considered to be under the care and guidance of their parents. As a result, it may be necessary to sacrifice some personal independence for the betterment of family harmony. Always tell your family where you are going and approximately when you plan to return. If you will arrive home late, you should call to let them know.



Important Behavioral Points

- * Do not touch a Thai person's head, as it is considered the most sacred part of the body.
- * Try to maintain your head at the same level of others. If people are seated on the floor, you should avoid standing over them for a prolonged period of time.
- * Always remove your shoes before entering a person's home or a temple. Do so even if you are told that you can leave them on. Some offices and businesses may also require shoe removal prior to entry. If in doubt, check the area near the door to see if there are shoes or shoe racks.
- * Using your feet for anything other than standing or walking is unacceptable. Do not prop your feet up on a table or desk, and try not to point your feet at people.
- * It is considered impolite to point your finger directly at someone.
- * Show reverence to all Buddhist objects and places. Women should not touch a monk or his robes, and they should not wear sleeveless shirts and/or shorts in temples.
- * When eating with Thais, several dishes are usually ordered. You should take a few spoonfuls of each dish at a time. Do not pile large quantities of food on your plate.
- * Public displays of affection are definitely not encouraged.
- * Thais greet each other with a Wai, a prayer-like gesture whereby the palms of the hands are pressed together and raised. This level ranges between one's chest and nose: the higher represent the most respect, but normally it should not be higher than the highest level just stipulated. As a general rule it is polite to Wai when meeting someone older or in a more senior position than you.

Dos and Don'ts in Thailand

Do:

- "wai" for greeting
- speak softly
- limit physical contact
- take off your shoes before entering (places like temples, homes, etc.)
- dress politely when attending a class

Don't:

- touch others' head
- point your foot towards anything
- talk negatively about Thai Royal Family
- touch a monk or his robes



Standard in Dressing

Outward appearances are important in Thai society. The saying "clothes make a person" without question holds true in Thailand. Thais will appreciate foreigners who make a concerted effort to maintain a professional, reserved appearance. Most potential blunders or faux pas can be avoided by adhering to a few basic guidelines.

Casual Attire:

As a general rule, Thais tend to dress more modestly than westerners. Although T-shirts are acceptable for going just about anywhere, sports clothes and tank tops are worn almost exclusively for sporting activities. For casual wear, men and women's shorts should be of a modest length.



Student Uniforms:

The university undergraduate students in Thailand are requested to wear uniforms, which consist of white shirts and black skirts/pants. Each faculty at PSU has its own uniform code. The student dress code at PSU not only serves to identify the respective faculty of each student, but also shows respect for both the teachers and the university. Graduate students are not required to wear uniforms, but should dress politely. Wearing inappropriate clothing in a classroom may be interpreted as disrespectful to the teacher, and offending students might not be allowed to attend class.

Thai Language

Thai is a tonal language, which means that the tone of a word is used to distinguish its meaning. Since there are five different tones, a word pronounced incorrectly is likely to have an entirely different meaning from that which was intended.

Please remember that when speaking English it is advisable to speak slowly and clearly. Do avoid using slang and idiomatic phrases, which will only confuse most Thais.

Some Basic Thai Phrases

English	Thai	
Good Morning/Afternoon	Sawaddee. * (to be polite, - a man would say Sawatdee Krub and - a woman would say Sawatdee Kha)	สวัสดี - สวัสดีครับ - สวัสดีค่ะ
Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms.	Khun	คุณ
How are you?	Khun sabai dee mai?*	คุณสบายดีไหม (ครับ,คะ)
Very well, thank you.	Sabai dee. Khoppkhun*	สบายดี ขอบคุณ (ครับ,ค่ะ)
Thank you.	khobkhun.*	ขอบคุณ (ครับ, ค่ะ)
What is your name?	Khun cheu arrai?*	คุณชื่ออะไร (ครับ,คะ)
My name is...	...cheu...*	ชื่อ.....(ครับ,ค่ะ)
I cannot speak Thai.	Pood Thai mai dai.*	พูดไทยไม่ได้ (ครับ,ค่ะ)
Please speak slowly.	Karuna Pood cha cha.*	กรุณาพูดช้าๆ (ครับ,ค่ะ)
I don't understand.	...mai khao chai.*	ไม่เข้าใจ (ครับ,ค่ะ)
Do you understand?	Khun khao chai mai?*	คุณเข้าใจไหม (ครับ,คะ)
Where is the restroom?	Hong nam yoo tee nai?*	ห้องน้ำอยู่ที่ไหน (ครับ,คะ)
What is this?	Nee arai?*	นี่อะไร (ครับ,คะ)
How much does it cost?	Nee Tao-rai?*	นี่เท่าไร(ครับ,คะ)
Sorry/excuse me.	Khor toad.*	ขอโทษ (ครับ,ค่ะ)
Yes.	Chai.*	ใช่ (ครับ,ค่ะ)
No.	Mai chai.*	ไม่ใช่ (ครับ,ค่ะ)
Go straight.	Trong pai.	ตรงไป
Turn left.	Leao sigh.	เลี้ยวซ้าย
Turn right.	Leao khua.	เลี้ยวขวา

* Use Krub or Kha after the sentence / phrase.

Thai Holidays/ Festivals

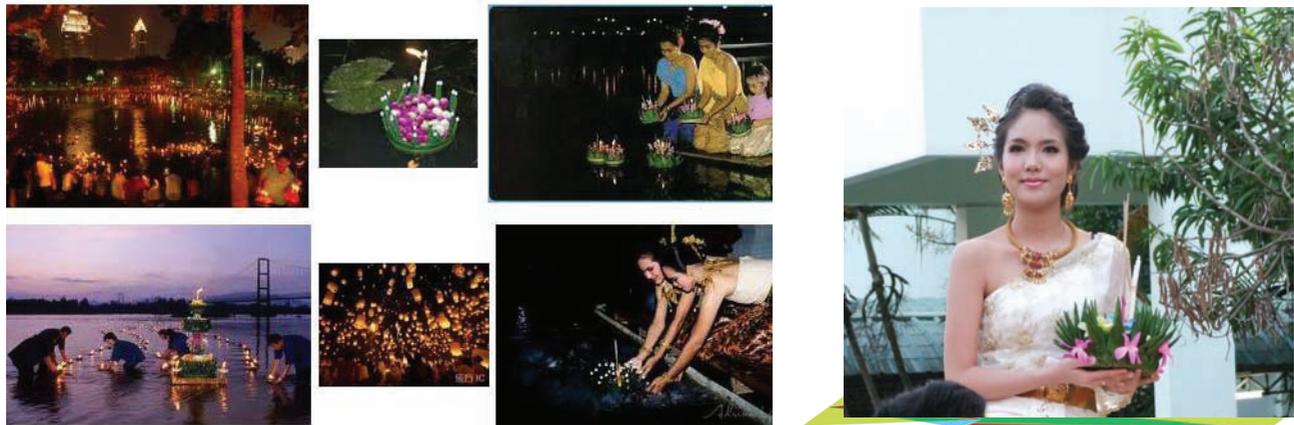
January 1	New Year's Day
***	Makha Bucha Day
April 6	Chakri Memorial Day
April 13-15	Songkran Festival
May 1	Labor Day
May 5	Coronation Day
***	Royal Ploughing Ceremony
***	Visaka Bucha Day
***	Asarnha Bucha Day
***	Buddhist Lent Day
August 12	Mother's Day
October 23	King Chulalongkorn Memorial Day
***	Loy Krathong Day
December 5	National Day
December 10	Constitution Day
December 31	New Year's Eve

***These holidays vary each year according to the lunar calendar.

Thai Festivals

Festivals are an essential part of Thai life and offer the visitor a valuable opportunity not only for having fun, but also for gaining an insight into various aspects of Thai culture.

Loy Krathong on the Full-Moon Day of November is one of the most popular festivals in Thailand. Every year staff and students are involved in the celebration of this festival on campus. "Loy Krathong" is the act of setting offerings afloat to pay homage to "Mae Kong Ka", goddess of the rivers. The "Krathong" represents a floating lotus and is more favorably made of decorated sections of the banana tree.



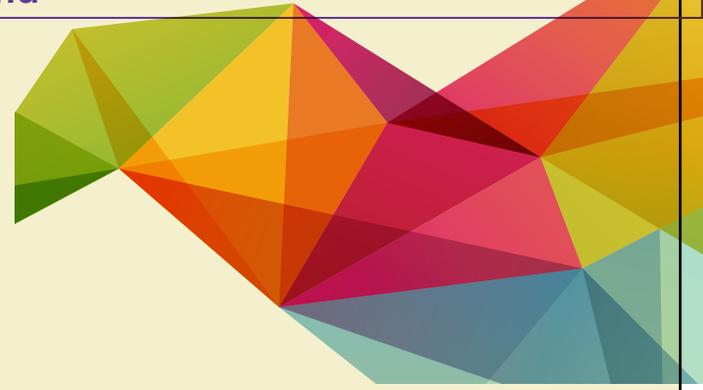
In addition, the widely known festival is **Songkran**. It is the traditional Thai New Year, which takes place in mid-April. Many foreign tourists come to Hat Yai city for the festival. Activities include water splashing, pageant parade, and numerous cultural performances. This is an occasion for merrymaking throughout the country.



◆ Emergency numbers in Thailand

Mobile Police	191
Fire Brigades	199
Tourist Police	1155
Emergency Medical Services (EMS)	1669 (nationwide)
Police General Hospital	0 2207 6000
Tourist Service Centre	1672
Highway Police	1193, 0 2354 6007
Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Head Office	0 2250 5500
Telephone Directory Assistance	1133

CHECKLIST



- Read about Thai culture and climate
- Learnt how to deal with Culture Shock
- Know what Immigration Procedures I have to follow once in Thailand
- Understood that I can get help from the International Students and Staff Office team
- Read about different Thai holidays and festivals
- Noted the emergency numbers while in Thailand

NOTES:



<https://en.psu.ac.th>



<http://interaffairs.psu.ac.th>

