



Thailand

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Best Regional Specialities

- » Kàì yâang (p715)
- » Southern-style curries (p750)
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Best Places for Cultural Connections

- » Meditation Retreats (p689)
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Why Go?

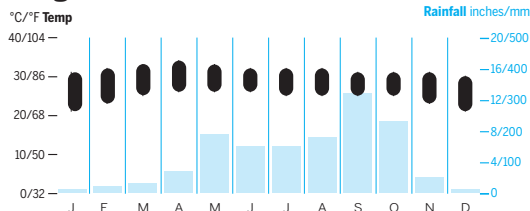
Lustrous Thailand radiates a hospitality that makes it one of the most accessibly exotic destinations on earth. Its natural landscape is part of the allure: the blonde beaches are lapped at by cerulean seas, while the northern mountains cascade into the misty horizon. In between are emerald-coloured rice fields and busy, prosperous cities. It is a bountiful land where the markets are piled high with pyramids of colourful fruits and the *rót khēn* (vendor cart) is an integral piece of a city's infrastructure.

The new millennium has brought Thailand into a new era of prosperity. Bangkok reigns as an Asian superstar, and once rustic islands are now international package resorts. It is easy and cheap to hop around by plane and domestic tourists are just as likely to hit the tourist trail as foreigners.

You'll suffer few travelling hardships and be rewarded with fodder for the mind and spirit, from fiery curries to meditating Buddhas.

When to Go

Bangkok



Nov–Feb Cool and dry season; peak tourist season is December to January.

Mar–Jun Hot season is hot but a good shoulder season for the beaches.

Jul–Oct Rainy season begins with a drizzle and ends with a downpour.

Don't Miss

Seeing the early morning alms route – when barefoot, orange-robed monks walk the streets collecting food from the faithful – is one of the great highlights (made easy when suffering from jet-lag) in Thailand. The silent procession transforms Thailand's otherwise deafening cities into calm, meditative spaces.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Get tussled about by Bangkok's chaos, then cruise up to Sukhothai to tour the quiet old ruins. Continue north to Chiang Mai, an easy, breezy cultural city. Climb up the mountain range to Pai for mountain scenery and bluesy late-nighters.

Two Weeks

From Bangkok, head south to the Samui islands (Ko Samui, Ko Pha-Ngan, Ko Tao) to become a certified beachaholic and diver. Then hop the peninsula to the Andaman beaches of Krabi/Railay, Ko Phi-Phi, Ko Lanta and Trang Islands.

Essential Food

- » **kài phật bai kà-phrao kài** – fiery stir-fry of chopped chicken, chillies, garlic and fresh basil.
- » **khào phật** – fried rice, you never knew it could be so good; garnish it with ground chillies, sugar, fish sauce and a squirt of lime.
- » **phật phrìk thai krà-thiam kài/mỗ** – stir-fried chicken or pork with black pepper and garlic.
- » **phật thai** – Thailand's oh-so-famous dish of rice noodles fried with egg and prawns garnished with bean sprouts, peanuts and chillies; eaten with chopsticks.
- » **phật phàk khanáa** – stir-fried Chinese greens, often fried with a meat (upon request), served over rice; simple but delicious.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Baht (B)
- » **Language** Thai
- » **Money** ATMs wide-spread; 150B fee on foreign accounts
- » **Visas** 30-day free visa for air arrivals; 15-day free visa for land arrivals; pre-arrange 30-day tourist visas
- » **Mobile phones** Pre-pay SIMs from 150B

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 513,000 sq km
- » **Capital** Bangkok
- » **Country code** 266
- » **Emergency** 2191

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	32B
Canada	C\$1	31B
China	Y10	49B
Euro zone	€1	41B
Japan	¥100	37B
New Zealand	NZ\$1	25B
Russia	Ruble10	10B
UK	£1	49B
US	US\$1	31B

Set Your Budget

- » **Basic room** US\$6–25
- » **Market meals** US\$1–2
- » **Beer** US\$1.30–2.50

Entering the Country

- » **International flights**
Arrive at Suvarnabhumi Airport, Bangkok.
- » **Popular border crossings**
Poipet–Aranya Prathet (Cambodia); Huay Xai–Chiang Khong (Laos); Ko Lipe–Langkawi (Malaysia)