



# Thailand

📍 66 / POP 67.5 MILLION

## Includes ➔

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## Best for Regional Specialities

- ➔ nahm (p665)
- ➔ Kow Soy Siri Soy (p694)
- ➔ Larp Khom Huay Poo (p708)
- ➔ Ging Pagarang (p745)

## Best Places for Cultural Connections

- ➔ Meditation Retreats in Chiang Mai (p691)
- ➔ Elephant Study Centre (p724)
- ➔ Ban Kham Pia (p718)
- ➔ Mae Hong Son (p708)

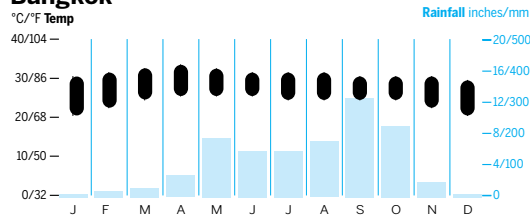
## Why Go?

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 built around sacred temples. It is a bountiful land where the markets are piled high with pyramids of colourful fruits and the *rót khên* (vendor cart) is an integral piece of a city's infrastructure.

You'll suffer few travelling hardships, save for a few pushy touts, in this land of comfort and convenience. Bangkok reigns as an Asian superstar, Chiang Mai excels in liveability and the tropical islands are up all night to party. It is relatively cheap to hop around by plane and the kingdom provides a gateway to everywhere else in the region – though the fiery curries and simple stir-fries might delay your departure.

## 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** Wet season begins with a drizzle and ends with a downpour; July to August is a mini high season.

## AT A GLANCE

- ➔ **Currency** Baht (B)
- ➔ **Language** Thai
- ➔ **Money** ATMs widespread; 150B fee on foreign accounts
- ➔ **Visas** 30-day free visa for air arrivals; 30- or 15-day free visa (depending on nationality) for land arrivals; pre-arrange 60-day tourist visas
- ➔ **Mobile phones** Pre-pay SIMs from 150B

## Fast Facts

- ➔ **Area** 513,000 sq km
- ➔ **Capital** Bangkok
- ➔ **Emergency** ☎191

## Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	29B
Cambodia	10,000r	80B
Euro Zone	€1	45B
Laos	10,000K	41B
Malaysia	RM10	99B
UK	UK£1	54B
US	US\$1	33B

## Set Your Budget

- ➔ **Basic room** US\$10–25
- ➔ **Market meals** US\$1.50–2
- ➔ **Beer** US\$3

## Entering the Country

Fly to Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, Bangkok. Popular land crossings include Poipet/Aranya Prathet (Cambodia), Huay Xai/ Chiang Khong (Laos) and Ko Lipe/Langkawi (Malaysia).

## 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 easygoing 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 and Ko Lanta.

## Essential Food

- ➔ **Pàt gàprow gàì** Fiery stir-fry of chopped chicken, chillies, garlic and fresh basil.
- ➔ **Kôw pàt** Fried rice, you never knew it could be so good; garnish it with ground chillies, sugar, fish sauce and a squirt of lime.
- ➔ **Pàt pàk tai krà-thiam gàì/mổ** Stir-fried chicken or pork with black pepper and garlic.
- ➔ **Pàt tai** Thailand's oh-so-famous dish of rice noodles fried with egg and prawns garnished with bean sprouts, peanuts and chillies; eaten with chopsticks.
- ➔ **Pàt pàk kanáh** Stir-fried Chinese greens, often fried with a meat (upon request), served over rice; simple but delicious.