

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

Thailand offers a wide variety of accommodation from cheap and basic to pricey and luxurious. Accommodation rates listed in this book are high-season prices for either single or double rooms. Icons are included to indicate where internet access, swimming pools or air-con are available; otherwise, assume that there's a fan.

A two-tiered pricing system has been used in this book to determine budget category (budget, midrange, top end). In big cities and beach resorts, rates under 1000B are budget, under 3000B are midrange, with top end over 3000B. For small towns, rates under 600B are budget, under 1500B are midrange and top end over 1500B.

In places where spoken English might be limited, it is handy to have the following:

hông pát lom (room with fan) and *hông aa* (room with air-con).

The following are descriptions of the types of lodging you'll find in Thailand.

Guesthouses

Guesthouses are generally the cheapest accommodation in Thailand and can be found all along the backpacker trail. In areas like the northeast and parts of the southeast, guesthouses (as well as tourists) are not as widespread.

Rates vary according to facilities, from a rock-bottom 150B for a room with shared bathroom and a rickety fan to over 600B for a room with private facilities, air-con and a TV. Many guesthouses make their bread and butter from their onsite restaurants that serve the classic backpacker fare (banana pancakes and fruit shakes). Although these restaurants are convenient and a good way to meet other travellers, don't measure Thai food based on dishes you've eaten in famously mediocre guesthouses.

Most guesthouses cultivate a travellers' ambience with friendly knowledgeable staff and minor amenities like tourist information and book exchanges. But there are also plenty of guesthouses with grumpy, often disgruntled, clerks who let customers know that they dislike their jobs.

Increasingly guesthouses can handle advance reservations, but due to inconsistent cleanliness and quality it is advisable to always look at a room in person before committing. In tourist centres, if your preferred place is full, there are usually a dozen alternatives nearby. Guesthouses typically only accept cash payments.

A subset of the traditional guesthouse is the beach bungalow, which occupies the backpacker destinations along the Thai coastline.

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

PRACTICALITIES

- *Bangkok Post* and the *Nation* publish national and international news daily.
- There are more than 400 AM and FM radio stations; short-wave radios can pick up BBC, VOA, Radio Australia, Deutsche Welle and Radio France International.
- Six VHF TV networks carry Thai programming, plus TrueVision UBC cable with international programming.
- The main video format is PAL.
- Thailand uses 220V AC electricity; power outlets most commonly feature two-prong round or flat sockets.
- Thailand follows the international metric system. Gold and silver are weighed in *bàat* (15g).

Increasingly rare are the simple palm thatch and bamboo huts, which have been replaced by sturdier wooden or concrete bungalows. Regardless of quality, many bungalows are usually smack dab on the beach or built on a hillside overlooking the ocean.

Hotels & Resorts

In provincial capitals and small towns, the only options are often older Thai-Chinese hotels, once the standard in all of Thailand. Most cater to Thai guests and English is usually limited.

These hotels are multistorey buildings and might offer a range of rooms from midrange options like private bathrooms, air-con and TV to cheaper ones with shared bath facilities and a fan. In some of the older hotels, the toilets are squats and the 'shower' is a *klong jar* (a large terracotta basin from which you scoop out water for bathing). Although the Thai-Chinese hotels have got tons of accidental retro charm, unless the establishment has been recently refurbished, we've found that they are too old and worn to represent good value compared to the guesthouses.

In recent years, there has been a push to fill the budget gap for ageing backpackers or young affluent travellers who want the ambience of a guesthouse with the comforts of a hotel. Now in major tourist towns, new 'flashpacker' hotels have dressed up the utilitarian options of the past with stylish decor and creature comforts.

International chain hotels can be found in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket and other high-end beach resorts. Many of these upscale resorts incorporate traditional Thai architecture with modern minimalism.

Most top-end hotels and some midrange hotels add a 7% government tax (VAT) and an additional 10% service charge. The additional charges are often referred to as 'plus plus'. A buffet breakfast will often be included in the room rate. If the hotel offers Western breakfast, it is usually referred to as 'ABF', a strange shorthand meaning American breakfast.

Midrange and chain hotels, especially in major tourist destinations, can be booked in advance and some offer internet discounts through their websites or online agents. They also accept most credit cards, but only a few deluxe places accept American Express.

In most countries, 'resort' refers to hotels that offer substantial recreational facilities (eg tennis, golf, swimming and sailing) in addition to accommodation and dining. In Thai hotel lingo, however, the term simply refers to any hotel that isn't in an urban area. Hence a few thatched beach huts or a cluster of bungalows in a forest may be called a 'resort'. Several places in Thailand fully deserve the resort title under any definition – but it will pay for you to look into the facilities before making a reservation.

National Parks Accommodation

Most national parks have bungalows or campsites available for overnight stays. Bungalows typically sleep as many as 10 people and rates range from 800B to 2000B, depending on the park and the size of the bungalow. These are popular with extended Thai families who bring enough provisions to survive the Apocalypse. A few parks also have *reu-an taa-ou* (longhouses).

Camping is available at many parks for 60B per night. Some parks rent tents (300B a night) and other sleeping gear, but the condition of the equipment can be poor.

The **National Parks' department** (www.dnp.go.th/parkreserve) now has a comprehensive, if slightly clunky online booking system for all parks. Do note that reservations for camp sites and bungalows are handled on different pages within the website. Advance bookings can be made a month ahead and are recommended for popular parks, especially on holidays and weekends.