

## **Thailand**

### **Facts and Statistics**

**Location:** Southeastern Asia, bordering the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand, southeast of Burma

**Capital:** Bangkok

**Climate:** tropical; rainy, warm, cloudy southwest monsoon (mid-May to September); dry, cool northeast monsoon (November to mid-March); southern isthmus always hot and humid

**Population:** 64,865,523

**Ethnic Make-up:** Thai 75%, Chinese 14%, other 11%

**Religions:** Buddhism 95%, Muslim 3.8%, Christianity 0.5%, Hinduism 0.1%, other 0.6% (1991)

**Government:** constitutional monarchy

### **Languages in Thailand**

The Thai language is comprised of 44 consonants, 32 vowels and five tones in Thai pronunciation, along with a script that has Indian origins. The Thai language, belonging to the Tai family, is the main language in Thailand although there are several regional dialects as well. Other languages spoken in Thailand are Chinese, Lao, Malay and Mon-Khmer, while English use is becoming more prevalent in government and commerce. English is also being taught as a second language in secondary school and universities, which enables the English speaking visitor in Thailand to have little trouble conversing.

### **Thai Society & Culture**

#### **The Wai**

- . The wai is the common form of greeting and adheres to strict rules of protocol.
- . Raising both hands, palms joined with the fingers pointing upwards as if in prayer, lightly touching the body somewhere between the chest and the forehead, is the standard form.
- . The wai is both a sign of respect as well as a greeting. Respect and courtesy are demonstrated by the height at which the hands are held and how low the head comes down to meet the thumbs of both hands.
- . The wai may be made while sitting, walking, or standing.
- . The person who is junior in age or status is the first one to offer the wai.
- . The senior person returns the wai, generally with their hands raised to somewhere around their chest.
- . If a junior person is standing and wants to wai a senior person who is seated, the junior person will stoop or bow their head while making the wai.
- . If there is a great social distance between two people, the wai will not be returned.

#### **Buddhism in Thailand**

- . Thailand is a stronghold of Buddhism.
- . Buddhists believe that life does not begin with birth and end with death, but rather that every person has several lives based upon the lessons of life not yet learned and acts committed (karma) in previous lives.
- . Buddhists believe that selfishness and craving result in suffering and that compassion and love bring happiness and well-being.
- . The true path to peace is to eliminate all desire, a condition which Buddhists define as 'nirvana', an indescribable state free of desire, suffering, or further rebirth, in which a person simply is, and is completely at one with his surroundings.
- . Buddhism is practiced in Thailand by over 90% of the population.

#### **Hierarchical Society**

- . Thais respect hierarchical relationships.
- . Social relationships are defined as one person being superior to the other.
- . Parents are superior to their children, teachers to their students, and bosses to their subordinates.
- . When Thais meet a stranger, they will immediately try to place you within a hierarchy so they know how you should be treated.
- . This is often done by asking what might be seen as very personal questions in other cultures.
- . Status can be determined by clothing and general appearance, age, job, education, family name, and social connections.

### **Thai Family Values**

- . The family is the cornerstone of Thai society.
- . Family life is often more closely knit than in western cultures.
- . The Thai family is a form of hierarchy with the parents at the top.
- . Children are taught to honour their parents.

### **Thai Demeanor**

- . Thais place great emphasis and value on outward forms of courtesy such as politeness, respect, genial demeanor and self-control in order to maintain harmonious relations.
- . Many of their rules of etiquette are by-products of the Buddhist religion.
- . It is a non-confrontational society, in which public dispute or criticism is to be avoided at all costs.
- . To be openly angry with someone might attract the wrath of the spirits, which in turn could cause violence and tragedy.
- . Openly criticizing a person is a form of violence as it hurts the person and is viewed as a conscious attempt to offend the person being rebuked
- . Loss of face is a disgrace to a Thai so they try to avoid confrontations and look for compromises in difficult situations.
- . If two parties disagree, one will need to have an outlet to retreat without losing face.