

Thailand

Planning a trip to Thailand? Then you should talk to us... We offer independent expert advice and the ability to deliver top quality itineraries with the best tour operators that are exceptional value for money. Arranging your travel through The Specialist Travel Consultancy also reduces the time you have to spend researching and planning your trip. And our service is completely free! Contact us to discuss your travel requirements on **0845 838 7667** or for more information on the service we offer please visit our website: www.thestc.co.uk

- We arrange tailor made trips:**
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 - Geography Tours •

Facts & Highlights

Full Name: Thailand

Area: 513,115 sq km (198,115 sq miles)

Population: 64.5 million

Capital City: Bangkok (pop. 9.4 million)

People: 75% Thai, 11% Chinese, 3.5% Malay, Khmer, Mon and Karen minorities.

Language(s): Thai. English is spoken widely.

Religion(s): Theravada Buddhism (90%), Mahayana Buddhism, Muslim, Sikhs, Hindus & Christians make up the other 10%.

Currency: Baht

Government: Constitutional monarchy.

Electricity: 220 volts AC, 50Hz.

Time: GMT +7 hours. Flat blade two pin plugs.

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The Grand Palace, Bangkok: One of the most spectacular sites in Asia, the Grand Palace is a must on any itinerary.

Chiang Mai: Find amazing temples, food and crafts in this gateway city of the north.

Hill tribe trekking: Walk between traditional tribal villages in the forested hills of Thailand's north.

Kanchanaburi: Take a history lesson with a visit to the Bridge over the River Kwai and a ride on the Death Railway.

Ayutthaya: Stroll amongst the UNESCO world-heritage temple complexes of Thailand's ancient capital.

Island getaways: Kick back and savour paradise on the stunning beaches and tropical islands of the Thai peninsula.

Sea Kayaking: Paddle the spectacular shores of Krabi and the Andaman coast for an active beach phase.

Erawan National Park: Explore the trails and waterfalls of this beautiful area of western Thailand.

Thailand's popularity as an adventure travel destination is no coincidence - not only does it represent excellent value for money, but it also has a wonderfully diverse array of offerings: trekking, tribal encounters, jungle exploration, temples, religion, bustling markets and glorious beaches. It's a dream of a destination.

Despite its reputation as a destination for the package tourist, it is easy to get well off the beaten track and find a culture that has changed little over the years. Of course, a well planned itinerary and local knowledge are essential for this, and our tour operators for Thailand are recognised as being amongst the best in the world.

For all its bad press, Bangkok is a city sensation. It is certainly not the prettiest, but amongst the high rise concrete buildings lie quiet temples and busy markets. It is a shoppers paradise and a great place to pick up bargains before the journey home.

Not too far from Bangkok lies the ancient capital of Ayutthaya, a UNESCO World Heritage site with countless temples, pavilions and ruined monuments. It is a great place to explore on bike or foot.

To the west lies the fine limestone landscape of Kanchanaburi and the "Bridge over the River Kwai". The bridge itself often comes as a disappointment, not living up to the expectations generated from the famous film, however, the associated memorials and the "death train" itself, as well as the surrounding waterfalls, caves and historical monuments, make this an excellent location at which to spend a few days.

The north of the country is famed for delectable food, colourful festivals and its remote and traditional hill tribes. There are many options if you base yourself at the bustling town of Chiang Mai, with 3 or 4 day jungle treks visiting different tribal communities, as well as possibilities for elephant riding, cycling and bamboo rafting.

In the far north the town of Chiang Rai is gateway to the famous Golden Triangle region bordering Myanmar and Laos - in the past associated with lawless Opium production. Now, the area offers museums, markets, river cruises and opportunities for trekking, cycling and rafting.

South of Bangkok you enter the Thai peninsula. Here the bays, beaches, and tropical islands offer groups the chance to wind down amongst spectacular and beautiful surroundings with sea kayaking, snorkelling and SCUBA diving all possible options. We can also arrange for PADI diving courses to be taken if required.

Any itinerary in Thailand can be combined with visits to Malaysia, Laos, Cambodia & Vietnam as required. Extensions to see the largest temple complex in the world at Angkor Wat in Cambodia, or onward flights to southern Vietnam to see the tunnel networks and the history of the Vietnam war are all eminently feasible. Much will depend on time and budget, but we will take time to fully understand your requirements and establish a programme to suit your needs.



Suggested Itineraries

Below is a suggested itinerary for a two week adventure tour, however, we are able to create a completely tailor-made solution to your travel needs, either based on this itinerary or by constructing one from scratch. Contact us to discuss your requirements.

Day 1 - 3 Fly UK – Bangkok, where we spend a couple of days exploring the waterways, markets and temples of this buzzing city.

4 - 5 River Kwai: Spend a memorable day in this infamous area where thousands died creating the Death Railway. For a change in mood we head to one of Thailand's most beautiful national parks for a dip beneath a waterfall.

6 Ayutthaya: Explore the Buddhist monuments, ancient temples and royal ruins of this once majestic city. This former

Geography & Climate

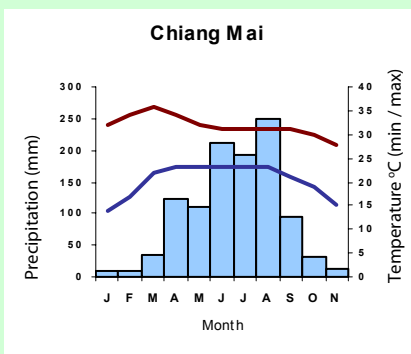
Thailand's geography is in keeping with its location within the tropics, but from north to south there is wide variety.

In the far north, the lower reaches of the Himalaya create hills and mountains that are covered in thick, tropical forests intersected by lush river valleys. To the north east, lie high, semi-arid plateaus.

The irrigated and fertile central plains are a major centre for production of rice and fruit. In the south, the geography is one of palm fringed tropical islands, teeming coral reefs, rubber estates and forested mountains.

Thailand's climate is generally hot and tropical year round, although within this there are three distinct seasons, although regional variations will determine exactly when these start and finish.

March to May is generally hot, June to October is the rainy season, characterised by brief but often heavy downpours, and the cool and dry season from November through to February – generally considered the best time to travel. If heading for the hill tribes during this time, the nights can get quite cold.



capital saw 33 kings come and go before eventually being destroyed by the Burmese.

7 Chiang Mai: The city is bursting with temples, shops and delicious food.

8 - 10 Hilltribe Trek: We get right off the beaten track, hiking through Thailand's northern hills, staying overnight in simple traditional huts. It is a privilege to meet the locals and learn about their fascinating cultures and day to day life.

11 Chiang Mai: Time for a well deserved shower, massage or maybe even a cooking class!

12 - 13 Chiang Rai: From Chiang Rai, take a visit the beautiful Golden Triangle on the border junction of Thailand, Burma and Laos. Boat trip down the Mekong.

14 - 16 Bangkok/UK: Returning to Bangkok in time for our flight home.

Customs and Rituals

It is forbidden for Buddhist monks to touch or be touched by a woman, or to accept anything from the hand of a woman. If a woman wants to give alms, she must first hand it to a man, who will then present it to the monk. Alternatively, they should place it on a cloth carried by the monks for such purposes.

National Holidays

Jan 1: New Year's Day.

Feb/Mar: Magha Bucha Day (dates vary)

Apr 6: Chakri Day.

Apr 13-15: Songkran (Thai New Year).

May 1: Labour Day.

May 5: Coronation Day.

May/June: Visakha Bucha (dates vary)

July 1: Mid Year Bank Holiday.

July: Khao Phansa Day (dates vary)

Aug 12: HM The Queen's Birthday.

Oct 23: Chulalongkorn day.

Dec 5: HM The King's Birthday.

Dec 10: Constitution Day.

Dec 31: New Year's Eve.

Festivals

Songkhran: The festival of the Thai New Year in mid April is characterised with water fights right across the country.

Loy Krathong: This festival in late October or early November celebrates the end of the rainy season and involves flowers and candles being floated on waterways throughout the whole country.

Project Work

Most projects are usually based in the north of the country and involve teaching



in local schools and orphanages or improving local services and facilities for tribal communities. Different tour operators have access to different project possibilities, so call us with your requirements and we can assess all the options for you.

Price Guide

Thailand offers excellent value for money. Prices vary enormously depending on the length and style of trip required, as well as the number of participants involved and date of departure. Two week itineraries start from around £1,300 including flights. Extended expeditions can be in excess of £2,000 per person, dependent on itinerary and whether project work is also required. Everyone is required to pay an international departure tax in Thailand, currently 700 Bht (approx £12.00)

Regulations & Red Tape

A full passport, valid for 6 months after your return date, is required for travel to Thailand. British passport holders do not currently need a visa for stays of up to 30 days in length.

Useful Addresses

Royal Thai Embassy

29-30 Queens Gate, London SW7 5JB

Tel: 020 7589 2944

Web: www.thaiembassyuk.org.uk

Open: Mon-Fri 0930-1230

Tourism Authority of Thailand

3rd Floor, Brook House, 98-99 Jermyn

Street, London SW1Y 6EE

Tel: 0870 900 2007

Web: www.thaismile.co.uk

More Information

To discuss the travel possibilities that Thailand offers in greater detail and receive free independent advice on potential tour operators, please contact:

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