

# Welcome Information for Volunteers

Thailand is a warm and welcoming country. The people pride themselves in hosting volunteers and visitors with a friendly smile in the hopes your stay is most enjoyable. The information below is offered as guidance in your preparation to visit Thailand and to

## How do I get to Thailand?

Flights to Thailand are serviced by approximately 70 listed airlines that have licenses from the Thai government and abide by international standards, including Aeroflot, Air France, Cathay Pacific, Emirates, Lufthansa, United Airlines, Swiss Air, and many others. The Thai national airlines itself is Thai Airways, one of the most esteemed airlines in the world.

Air carriers that travel to Thailand depart from all around the world, such as USA, Canada, UK, Germany, Sweden, France, Italy, UAE, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand. The flights entering Thailand may be direct flights or transit flight. The main landing port in Thailand is Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok. Regular services operate out of this airport to regional airports throughout Thailand and these services are reasonably priced.

## Do I need a Visa to enter Thailand?

There are two fundamental visa options for a visitor to Thailand from most countries: 1. Arrive by air without a visa and get a free 30 day “Visa Waiver” entry stamp on arrival, which can later be extended by up to 10 days at an immigration post in Thailand. (Arrival by land without a visa only provides 15 days entry.) Visa Waivers are only available to citizens of select nations.

(Check details by visiting [www.mfa.go.th](http://www.mfa.go.th) and go to the Consular Services tab. Here you will find all the information you need, including the countries where passport holders do not need a visa)

2. Depending on your nationality, you may need to apply to a Thai consulate or embassy for a visa before you travel. For more information, please visit Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand: [www.mfa.go.th](http://www.mfa.go.th)

## Entering Thailand for the first time

When you arrive by air to Thailand’s port of entry you will be asked to complete an entry card to present at immigration. Attached to the entry card is a departure card, which will be given back to you. Keep this card for your departure from the country.

You must write on the entry card an address where you will be staying. We will provide you with this address once your volunteering plan is confirmed.

## Where can I get information on accommodation near Suvarnabhumi International Airport?

To get the list of accommodation, you may check the following websites: [www.agoda.com](http://www.agoda.com) or [www.booking.com](http://www.booking.com) or [www.suvarnabhumiairport.com/th/24-hotels-near-suvarnabhumi-airport](http://www.suvarnabhumiairport.com/th/24-hotels-near-suvarnabhumi-airport)

## What's Thailand's climate like?

It is often said there are three seasons in Thailand: hot, hotter, and hottest. The northeast of Thailand, however, may experience some cool conditions in the winter months of December and January. From July through to November will be the Monsoon “rainy” season with frequent rain around 5.00 pm. There's a narrow temperatures range in August from mid 20C's at night to mid 30C's during the day with high humidity.

## Explore Thailand!

Thailand is full of activities to entertain visitors, so we encourage you to explore this exciting country either before or after your volunteering period. There are cultural festivals, great shopping opportunities and beautiful natural areas to explore. Thailand is undoubtedly a place anyone can enjoy at any time of the year. Take advantage of your time in Thailand by seeking out excellent bargains on cultural or practical life items for the classrooms, or check out the inexpensive luxurious silk products that are widely available.

## What to bring

We have a few suggestions on things you could bring to Thailand to make your stay comfortable.

- As the weather is hot, light cotton and linen clothing is recommended.
- There will be times when an evening event or ceremony will require a more formal attire.
- The hotels usually provide a laundry service that is very convenient and reasonably priced, so travel light.
- Also, because of the heat and humidity, talc and deodorant are recommended.
- It is a tradition to remove shoes before entering many places in Thailand, so bring easy to remove footwear.
- Plug adaptor for Thailand – 2 prong for 220v/50cps is most common (caution to those coming from countries like US where the voltage is less)

## **Are Internet and email facilities widely available in Thailand?**

Internet services are available throughout Thailand and most hotels offer free wifi. There is a good cellular phone network in Thailand (3G or more)

## **Can I buy a SIM card for my mobile/cell phone?**

SIM cards from local Thai network providers are widely sold and may be used to call/text both locally and internationally. Phone reception is excellent and widely available.

All the hotels in Thailand provide international phone call service. Public phone booths can also be found at most places in Thailand. Moreover, several types of international phone cards are sold at shops such as the ubiquitous 7-11 chain.

## **Should I carry cash or traveller cheques or debit/credit cards?**

Thai Baht is the local currency. Exchange booths are available around Bangkok airport, tourist areas and in banks across Thailand. While major credit and debit cards are also accepted in most establishments and shopping centres, there are occasionally additional fees from both the retailer and your card provider. Travellers' cheques can be cashed at most banks throughout Thailand, though less so at retail establishments. ATM machines accept most cards and are easy to find everywhere.

## **How can I get the best exchange rate?**

Banks or legal money-changers offer the best rates. ATMs that accept Visa and other credit cards are easily found in the large cities and will provide you Thai currency, while many exchange booths will give you a cash advance on your credit card with a good exchange rate, though they will all levy an extra fee. ATMs in some tourist areas charge higher fees, so it's worth staying with the major bank machines that have more standard rates.

## **Working hours in Thailand?**

Business and commercial transactions are normally done on a Mon-Fri basis between 8am and 5pm. Most stores are open every day from 10am to 10pm. Government offices are on a Mon-Fri basis (except on public holidays) from 8.30am to 4.30pm with a 12.00 to 1.00pm lunch break. Banks, on the other hand, are on a Mon-Fri (except on public holidays) schedule from 9.30am to 3.30pm.

## Food and Water

Despite the fact that the authorities have made efforts to make tap water meet World Health Organization standards, very few people drink tap water in Thailand, even the local population. Bottled water is widely used instead.

Some people actually boil tap water before use, but this will not remove chemical toxins or remnants of whatever else was there before boiling. You should also be careful with ice, as freezing does not protect you from bacteria, viruses or chemicals. Most good restaurants and cafes will have ice made from filtered water from government-inspected ice providers.

Brushing your teeth with tap water is considered to be safe, although those with very sensitive stomachs may occasionally experience problems.

In restaurants, you will find the water to be generally safe. You can always buy small bottles if you like but make sure the seal has not been broken.

Street vendors and street food stalls are very popular and frequented by many Thais. It's a good idea to take some precautions with street food and know the common risks associated with this service. There are numerous excellent restaurants and many menus will have photos of the dishes and some will have English menus.

## What is the food like?

Thai food is internationally famous. Whether chili-hot or comparatively bland, harmony is the guiding principle behind each dish. Thai cuisine is essentially a marriage of centuries-old Eastern and Western influences harmoniously combined into something uniquely Thai. The characteristics of Thai food depend on who cooks it and who it's cooked for. Thai cooking also reflects the characteristics of a waterborne lifestyle. Aquatic animals, plants and herbs are major ingredients. Large cuts of meat have been eschewed. With their Buddhist background, Thais shunned the use of large animals in big chunks. Big cuts of meat were shredded and laced with herbs and spices.

Traditional Thai cooking methods were stewing and baking or grilling. Chinese influences were responsible for the introduction of frying, stir frying and deep-frying. Culinary influences from the 17th century onwards included Portuguese, Dutch, French and Japanese. For example, chilies were introduced to Thai cooking during the late 1600s by Portuguese missionaries who had acquired a taste for them while serving in South America.

Thais were very clever at 'Siamese-ising' foreign cooking methods, and substituting ingredients. The ghee used in Indian cooking was replaced by coconut oil, and coconut milk substituted for other dairy products.

Overpowering pure spices were toned down and enhanced by fresh herbs such as lemon grass and galangal. Eventually, fewer and less spices were used in Thai curries, while the use of fresh herbs increased. It is generally acknowledged that Thai curries burn intensely, but briefly,

whereas other curries with strong spices burn for longer periods. Furthermore, instead of serving dishes in courses, a Thai meal is served all at once, permitting diners to enjoy complementary combinations of different tastes.

A proper Thai meal should consist of a soup, a curry dish with condiments, and a dip with accompanying fish and vegetables. A spicy salad may replace the curry dish. The soup can also be spicy, but the curry should be replaced by non-spiced items. There must be a harmony of tastes and textures within individual dishes and the entire meal.

Desserts may consist of fresh fruit or one of the many traditional Thai sweets.

## **Is bargaining common in Thailand?**

Usually, fixed prices are the norm in department stores, while bargaining is expected at most other places. Generally, you can obtain a final figure of between 10-40% lower than the original asking price. Much depends on your skills and the shopkeeper's mood. But remember, Thais appreciate good manners and a sense of humour. With patience and a broad smile, you will not only get a better price, you will also enjoy shopping as an art.

## **Tipping in Thailand**

Tipping is not a usual practice in Thailand although it is becoming more common. Most hotels and restaurants add a 10% service charge to the bill. Taxi drivers do not require a tip, but the gesture is appreciated and 20-50 baht is acceptable for porters. In restaurants it is common for Thai's to leave the coins as a tip, though an additional 20-100 baht is not unheard of in nicer establishments, particularly if the service is good.

## **Greetings, Graces and Courtesies**

You will quickly discover that greetings are often done respectfully by a “wai” – pressing the hands together beneath the chin and slightly nodding the head. The Thai word for hello is “Sawasdee krap” (male) and “Sawasdee kaa” (female) accompanied by the wai. Thais generally do not shake hands in their greetings. Foreigners are generally forgiven for not understanding the nuances of Thai greetings.

Another characteristic of the Thai people is their generous spirit and happy disposition. Smiles are exchanged easily and show a genuine exchange of friendliness. Thais show their affection for others readily by sharing small gifts, taking lots of photos of themselves with friends, and exchanging social media contact details.

## **What are some cultural Do's and Don'ts in Thailand?**

Thai people are extremely polite and their behaviour is controlled by etiquette and influenced by Buddhism. Thai society is non-confrontational, and as such, you should avoid confrontations at all costs. Never lose your patience or show your anger no matter how frustrating or desperate the situation because this is considered a weakness in Thai society. It is important to cultivate an air of diplomacy when traveling in Asia. Conflicts can be easily resolved with a smile.

Dress code is also important. Thais like to dress smartly and neatly. Do not wear revealing clothing such as shorts, low cut dresses, and bathing suits as they are considered as improper attire in Thailand. Keep in mind that this type of clothing is only acceptable in the beach. It is advisable to wear long skirts or long trousers when entering a temple.

Remove shoes when entering houses and temples.

Public display of affection between sexes is frowned upon.

The head is the highest part of the body, so avoid touching it. The feet are the least sacred, so avoid pointing it at anyone or kicking them as it is extremely insulting to do so. Thais usually do not shake hands.

Women should not touch monks. If a woman wants to hand something to a monk, she must do so indirectly by placing the item within the monk's reach.

When entering a foreign culture for the first time, it is highly likely to make a mistake. If you do so in Thailand, just smile or 'Wai' and you will be forgiven.

## **What languages are spoken in Thailand?**

The main language spoken in Thailand is Thai.

Different parts of Thailand have different dialects and different ways of speaking, so it can be quite difficult to understand Thai speakers from another part of the country.

Hill tribes and other ethnic groups have their own languages; for instance, there are villages of Chinese settlers in Thailand where little Thai is spoken, or on the islands where sea gypsies have settled.

English is the most common second language, and many Thais have studied some level of English either at school or through practice with foreign friends.

## **Interested in coming back?**

The Montessori expansion in Thailand has been rapid and is in constant need of support. Hundreds of government school teachers have received AMI teacher training and have implemented the Montessori method in their schools. If you are interested in returning to volunteer in Thailand, please contact the volunteer coordinator to express your desire and approximate timeline for your next visit.

## **International Montessori Congress 2021**

The next AMI Congress will be in Bangkok from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 2021. Planning and preparation for this major event is well under way and we anticipate there will be many opportunities for volunteering at the congress, as well as immediately before and immediately after the congress. Mark the date and let us know if you wish to be a part of the congress team.

## **Have a Wonderful Stay in Thailand!**

While we don't recommend a specific guidebook to plan your trips, to avoid unexpected troubles online research and information from various guidebooks can provide invaluable information. Once in Thailand ask for assistance if you need it – Thais are friendly and accommodating and will help if they can. Most of all, relax and enjoy our country and our unique hospitality.

### **Useful phone numbers and addresses**

Montessori Association of Thailand: (66) 0870035018 or 0956698185 or 0819437712 or 0874290108

Tourist Police (English, French and German spoken): 1155

Central Emergency (Police, Ambulance, Fire): 191

Crime Suppression: 195 or (662) 513 3844

Immigration Bureau: (662) 287 3101-10

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