

THE MARKETING ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND



THE MAANZ MARKETING SKILLS PROGRAM

International Marketing

Work Book 10

Doing Business in Thailand

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Acknowledgements and References

The sources for this workbook are many and varied, as you would expect from such a work. A number of individuals provided their advice, experience and input. Also a number of published sources were researched. In particular, the following sources are acknowledged:

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/>

U.S. Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

AUSTRADE <http://www.austrade.gov.au/>

U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029390554>

CIA World Fact Book <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>

BBC Monitoring

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1108491.stm

Research & Analytical Papers: Asia

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029395726>

Executive Planet <http://www.executiveplanet.com/>

AsiaTour <http://www.asiatour.com/thailand/content1.htm>

Further MAANZ Resources

The Marketing Association has a number of other resources and publications related to this topic.

Negotiating in Asia

Travel Advice

Multicultural Marketing (4 Workbook series)

The "Doing Business in ... " Workbooks series currently includes Doing Business in...Australia; Brunei*; China; Hong Kong; India; Indonesia;

Japan; Korea; Laos*; Malaysia; New Zealand; Pakistan*; Philippines; Singapore; Sri Lanka*; Taiwan; Thailand; and Vietnam.

* Due for release mid 2004. Also due for release, late 2004 a new workbook on the Middle East and Russia.

There are also a number of additional books available for Background information. These include information on China; Hong Kong; India; Indonesia; Japan; Korea; Pakistan*; Philippines; Singapore; Sri Lanka*; Taiwan; Thailand; and Vietnam

Refer www.marketing.org.au for EVENTS section– Which links to several international country databases

Refer www.marketing.org.au for EVENTS section– Which links to currency converters

Refer www.marketing.org.au for EVENTS section– Which links to an international clock

Introduction/Overview of the Series.

The purpose of this series of 15 International Business Workbooks is to assist marketers to understand other markets better and to encourage international business/marketing.

They also form a significant part of The International Marketing Subject from MAANZ.

For further information on purchasing these workbooks contact: information @marketing.org.au

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General Information - Thailand

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy. Most of the population is Buddhist and ethnically Thai. Standard Thai is the official language of Thailand and is spoken in every province, though many areas also have a local dialect. Most Thais working in the tourist industry and in businesses dealing with foreigners can speak at least rudimentary English. Thailand is a popular travel destination, and tourist facilities and services are available throughout the country. At many tourist attractions, including national parks, foreigners are charged admission fees up to ten times higher than those charged to Thais.

Thailand is located in the heart of Southeast Asia, between China and India, with Burma bordering it on the west and north, Laos on the north-east, Cambodia on the east, and Malaysia on the south. The country has distinct divisions of topography, with mountains in the north, dry plateau in the north-east, plains in the central part, and a tropical south on the coast, with beaches and numerous offshore islands. The population is close to 60 million people, the majority of whom are native Thais. Thailand's capitol is Bangkok, a beautiful city that includes a mixture of the old and the new, from primitive structures and traditions to pagodas, skyscrapers, and a bustling modern culture.

The name Thailand translates as "Land of the Free," an apt description. Thailand holds the distinction of being the only Southeast Asian country that has never been colonised. Once

called Siam, its history dates back some 800 years, originating as an offshoot of the Khmer Empire, whose culture it adapted for its own. For many years, the people of Thailand enjoyed peaceful coexistence with its neighbours, until Burma invaded it in the 1700s and was later expelled by General Taksin and his followers. Upon Taksin's death, the current monarchical dynasty was established, starting with King Rama I. This line of kings included King Mongkut, Rama IV, who became famous in our century because of the popular stage and screen show, The King and I. Mongkut and his son, King Chwalongkom, Rama V, paved the way for peaceable relations with the west by abolishing slavery and initiating numerous reforms in education, administration, and public welfare. Today Thailand is a thriving country whose daily life is strongly influenced by Buddhist teachings. It advertises itself as "The Land of Smiles."

Language

Thai is the country's official language. English is the second-most spoken language.

Religion

Almost 95 percent of the population practices Buddhism, making Thailand one of the most strongly Buddhist countries in the world. Monks are revered, and throughout the country, the temple (wat) is the centre of all communities.

Ethnic Makeup

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About three quarters of the population are native Thai. Individuals of Chinese descent make up 14 percent, and a mixture of minorities make up the remaining 11 percent, including Burmese, Indian, Khmer, Lao, Malay, and Mon.

Weather

The climate in Thailand is hot and humid throughout the year. Temperatures can range from 68 to 91 degrees Fahrenheit. It can also be very rainy; downpours are common during May through September.

Thailand experiences three seasons with only minor differences in temperature. The cooler season occurs from November to February, when temperatures range from 68°F (20°C) to 91°F (33°C). Summer occurs from March to June, when temperatures range from 75°F (24°C) to 95°F (35°C). The hot and rainy season occurs from July to October, when temperatures range from 75°F (24°C) to 89°F (32°C). Summer months are hot and humid, while the cooler season is sunny and dry. During the rainy months showers occur once a day in the late afternoon.

Currency

Thai currency is the baht. Currency is available in one and five baht coins. Notes are available in 10 bahts (brown), 20 bahts (green), 50 bahts (blue), 100 bahts (red), and 500 bahts (purple). 100 satang is equivalent to one baht.

While banks give favourable currency exchange rates, authorised money-changers and hotels will also provide good rates, sometimes only slightly lower than banks. If you

choose to exchange your currency at a bank, remember that they close by 3:30 p.m.

When exchanging travellers cheques for this country's currency, be sure to have your passport-you will need it for identification.

Refer www.marketing.org.au for EVENTS section- Which links to currency converters

Electricity.

The voltage is 220v, 50 cycles.

Entry Requirements.

For fifty countries including America, Argentina, Australia, Great Britain, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, and Sweden, a passport and a departure ticket are required. Transit visas are issued at the airport. For all other countries, visas must be obtained prior to arrival in Thai-land. Visitors should note that after a stay of ninety days in one calendar year, they are subject to tax and must provide tax clearance documents before leaving the country. Consult your tax and legal representatives for up-to-date information.

Tourists staying for less than 30 days may not require a visa, but must possess a passport and may be asked to show an onward/return ticket. A Passenger Service Charge must be paid in Thai baht when departing the country from any of Thailand's international airports.

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When a traveller enters the country, Thai Immigration stamps the date on which the traveller's authorised stay in Thailand will expire in his or her passport. Any traveller remaining in Thailand beyond this date without having received an official extension will be assessed an immediate cash fine when departing Thailand. Any foreigner found by police to be out of legal status prior to departure (during a Thai Immigration "sweep" through a guesthouse, for example) will be jailed, fined, and then deported at his or her own expense, and may be barred from re-entering Thailand.

In this regard, travellers should be aware that private "visa extension services," even those advertising in major periodicals or located close to Immigration offices or police stations, are illegal. In 2003, a number of foreigners were arrested at border crossings when the visas and entry stamps they had obtained through these illegal services were discovered to be counterfeit.

Thailand's Entry/Exit information is subject to change without notice. [For further information on Thailand's entry/exit requirements, contact the Royal Thai Embassy,](#)

In an effort to prevent international child abduction, many governments have initiated procedures at entry/exit points. These often include requiring documentary evidence of relationship and permission for the child's travel from the parent(s) or legal guardian if not present. Having such documentation on hand, even if not required, may facilitate entry/departure.

Air Travel

When flying into Bangkok, you will land at the Don Muang Airport. There are several options for transportation into the city, including taxis, airport limousines, airport buses, and even a tram to the station in Bangkok. Although the trip usually takes an hour from the airport to the heart of the city, it can take twice as long if the weather is bad.

Refer www.marketing.org.au for EVENTS section– Which links to several international country databases

Getting About.

Bangkok has become a regional hub for air travel. There are plane, train, and bus services to major cities within Thailand and between Thailand and neighbouring countries.

In Bangkok, the Thai use the word *soi* and a *soi* number when giving addresses. *Soi* and a number refers to a secondary street that runs off a main road. The *soi* can have a number and a name. In identifying a building on a main road, Thais usually refer to its closest *soi* and number-name. For example, "Sukhumvit, Soi 12," "Soi 12 Sukhumvit," and "Soi 12, Sukhumvit Road" all refer to the same location, Soi 12, which is a secondary street off the main road, Sukhumvit. This method can make getting around Bangkok confusing. Thais are generally quite friendly and will assist you when you are lost if you ask politely and with a smile.

Even by highway, it usually takes about one hour to travel from the Don Muang Airport to Bangkok, but in the rainy season, this trip can take from one to two and a half hours. There are several ways to get into Bangkok from the airport including taxi, airport limousines, and hotel buses. For

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taxis, use the taxi reservations counter outside of the customs areas; otherwise you are liable to be charged significantly more than the normal cost of the trip. If the taxi does not have a meter, negotiate the price with the driver before getting into the taxi. Thai Airways has a minibus that runs from the airport to all major hotels. There is also train service from the airport to the central station in Bangkok which takes only forty minutes. Inquire at the airport tourist office for details.

In Bangkok, rush hour seems to last all day. The alternative to taxis is to rent a car and driver. The cost is about the same for a rental car, although self-driving is not recommended due to traffic and driving conditions. If you prefer to drive, an international driver's license is required. Call a major car rental agency prior to arriving in Bangkok or from your hotel and a car will be delivered to you. A word of caution: if a foreigner is in a traffic accident, he or she will be judged at fault, not the Thai. Adjust your schedule to include traffic delays.

Taxis are available through hotels or by waving one down on a street. There are plenty of taxis available, but select ones with signs or licenses posted visibly. Many drivers speak a little English. However, it is best to carry a hotel card noting your destination. In Bangkok, you will also find the *tuk-tuk*, a three-wheel motorcycle. While they can be faster and cheaper than taxis, the *tuk-tuk* drivers rarely speak English and often cannot understand where you want to go. Buses are efficient, but very crowded, and there are some air-conditioned buses and minibuses. The fare ranges from five to thirteen baht. English bus maps are available at hotels and tourist offices.

Writing Dates

Dates are written in non-western style as day, month, year. For example, January 30,1999, would be written 30/1/99.

Major Holidays

The following are the holidays that are celebrated throughout the country. It is wise to avoid scheduling meetings during these times.

January 1	New Year's Day
January/ February	Chinese New Year (the date varies, depending on the lunar calendar)
February/ March	Makhabucha Day (Buddhist New Year; the date varies, depending on the lunar calendar)
April 6	Chakri Day (a celebration of the founding of the royal dynasty)
Mid-April	Songkhran Day (Thai New Year')
May 1	Labour Day
May 5	Coronation Day
May 11	Harvest Festival Day
May 27	Buddhist Lent

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May/June Visakhabucha Day (a celebration of the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha; this is the honest of the Buddhist holidays; the date varies, depending on the lunar calendar)

July/August Asalahabuj a Day (a celebration honouring the beginning of the three-month Pongrains Retreat; the date varies, depending on the lunar calendar)

August 12 Queen's Day

October 23 Chulalongkorn Day (a celebration of the monarch from 1868 to 1919 who got rid of slavery)

December 5 King's Birthday

December 10 Constitution Day

December 25 Christmas Day

December 31 New Years Eve

Refer www.marketing.org.au for EVENTS section– Which lists international significant dates, and events

Country Telephone Codes

Thailand's country code is 66.

The major city codes are:

* 2 for Bangkok.

* 53 for Chiang Mai.

* 32 for Hua Hin.

* 38 for Pattaya.

* 76 for Phuket.

Time Zone Differences

Thailand is:

* Seven hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time.

* 12 hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Standard Time.

* Three hours behind Australian Eastern Time.

Reasons to do Business in Thailand

- Corn, sugar cane, and tapioca are among Thailand's chief exports.
- Manufacturing textiles is one of Thailand's strongest suits.
- Thailand is also very strong in agricultural processing.
- Thailand's chief crop is rice.

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- The country is a top producer of tin, tungsten, and gas.
- Thailand is very strong in the tourism industry.
- Thais are discrete people who keep criticism behind closed doors.
- The people of Thailand not only have a strong work ethic, they also smile more than any other people in the world.

Etiquette and Public Behaviour

You'll definitely want to be ready for the overwhelming smiles that you will receive from the Thais. After all, this is "The Land of Smiles." Thais smile for a variety of reasons, some of them obvious, others not so obvious. Because outward criticism is taboo, a Thai may even smile to indicate "I pardon you" or to excuse themselves when embarrassed.

A very important word to know is the bathroom, or the Hong Nahum. (Note: the literal translation is the "water room.") Men should ask for the sukha-chai, while women should ask the sukha-ying. When you finally find the room, be prepared to squat rather than sit. When you are finished, protocol dictates that you pour water from the available jug and then refill the water jug for the next person. Be sure to take plenty of tissue with you, because toilet paper is not common.

When walking into a room where a Buddha image is found, be sure to step over the threshold rather than walking on it. This

is because, as in some other Asian countries, it is believed that souls live there.

Bus etiquette: Always remember that the back seat of a bus is reserved for monks.

When in a public location, such as a theatre or auditorium, keep in mind that the front row is reserved for monks and high-ranking officials. Individuals of lesser status should sit behind them based on the rank and file order of the people who are present.

The Monarchy must be respected at all costs. Thus, keep your Thai banknotes in respectable places (never in your shoes or socks). In addition, always stand as a sign of respect when the Thai national anthem is being played.

Note that the appropriate way to sit is to kneel with your legs tucked under your body as you face the person of honour.

Your hands should always be clearly seen. This means keeping them out of your pockets and above a table. Your feet should remain close to your body rather than pointing outwards. Also note that it is rude to cross your legs whether you are sitting in a chair or on the ground.

Pointing is considered to be a faux pas in Thailand, so don't. In addition, never beckon to someone who is your equal or higher. When trying to get the attention of someone who is a subordinate, such as a server, do so by waving your hand with palm and fingers toward you.

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Many Thais sit on the ground. Do not walk over them, but wait for them to make space for you to walk between them. As you pass, be sure to bend your body respectfully.

Greetings and Introductions

When greeting a Thai, use the word *Khun* (pronounced *coon*) in place of "Mr." or "Mrs." and the person's first name, which is listed first on his or her business card. For example, a Westerner with the name "John Smith" would be called "Khun John." Among Thais, family names are not usually used. Most Thais refer to each other by their first names only. Never refer to yourself with the word *Khun*; simply say your first name. Thais will probably address you by using "Mr." or "Mrs." and your first name.

In order to avoid confusion, wait to see if your Thai counterpart extends a hand for a handshake. Thais increasingly have adopted this foreign greeting. Most Thais, although less in the private sector, greet someone by bowing slightly forward while bringing their hands to a praying position in front of them between the chest and forehead.

The exact location of the hands depends on the level of respect being offered. However, the fingertips should never go above the head. This gesture, known as *wai*, is the traditional respectful greeting. The presentation of your *wai* will vary, based on the person to whom you are extending it. If you are unsure of that person's status, keep your hands close to your body, with your forehead lowered to your thumbs and the tips of your fingers pointing straight down so that they are at neck level.

Among Thais, the height and depth of a person's *wai* indicates social status. When you *wai* back to your counterpart, you need not worry about the exact position of your hands. Thais are very tolerant and will be pleased with your attempt to participate culturally.

When meeting someone who is a subordinate, keep your fingertips held up, your thumbs closed and your forehead touching your thumbs, then bow so that your fingers are at chest level, as if you are meeting an equal or someone whose status you don't know.

When you are meeting someone who is a superior, your *wai* should be given by lowering your head to the point that your fingertips are above your nose.

In other situations, there's an even lower *wai*, which involves bending your body while lowering your forehead to your thumbs.

How to *wai* when meeting a Buddha or a monk: In this situation, it is appropriate to get on your knees to *wai*. Men do this legs bent under them, while women may sit with legs at one side. In this position, you should bend your body until your head barely touches the floor while facing the Buddha or monk being acknowledged. Rather than having your hands together as when you are standing, you should rest your palms on the floor. The ritual of bending to the floor and sitting up should be repeated three times (a lucky number in Thailand).

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Know when to wai: For individuals from abroad visiting Thailand, rather than initiating a wai, it may be more appropriate only to respond to one. One reason is that the wai may not be appropriate for the circumstances and you may actually offend someone. For instance, never wai at someone who is providing a service for you (such as a waiter).

Do not *wai* secretaries and clerks. The *wai* can be used when greeting someone on arrival and departure and also when saying "I am sorry" or "Thank you."

Business cards are always exchanged at the first meeting. It is important to carry a sufficient quantity; failure to offer a business card may make Thais suspicious of your position and authority. Hotels and department stores can help provide you with business cards. Be sure your card indicates your position and responsibility, as the Thais are impressed by titles.

Proper forms of address: When addressing a Thai, it is appropriate to address this person by his or her first name preceded by the title Mr. Mrs. or "Ms." (for example, "Mr. Tom," "Mrs. Janet," "Ms. Mary"). One reason for this is that last names were not even used in Thailand until the beginning of the 20th century (about 75 years ago), so first names are more commonly used out of tradition and habit. Note that if a person has a title based on his or her profession, you should use it in the same way you would "Mr.," Mrs., or Ms. or "Doctor Tom".

Handshakes:

When meeting a man for the first time, a handshake is appropriate. However, when meeting a woman for the first time, substitute a smile for a handshake. Allow a Thai woman to initiate a handshake.

Responding to a Thai greeting.- Rather than acknowledging another person with a "Good morning. How are you?," smiling or nodding is an appropriate greeting for people you see on a daily basis. Similarly, if a Thai asks, "Where are you going?" you are not being asked your itinerary for the day. Instead, the person is simply greeting you with the farang or Western equivalent of the greeting, "How are you?"

Conversation

Politics and the royal family are great topics for conversation, just as long as they are discussed in a positive way. Additional conversational topics might include Thai places of interest and restaurants.

Don't feel people are being too inquisitive by asking such personal questions as, "How old are you?" The reason they ask such questions is to determine the level of respect you should be shown.

Although many people associate Thailand with The King and I, this is not a topic to be discussed with the Thais. Neither the play nor the movie has been shown in Thailand, probably because Thais consider it to be a lack of respect for one of their revered monarchs.

Although art and music are great topics of conversation in many countries, it is best to stay away from these subjects

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when making small talk with a Thai. This is because the Thai with whom you are speaking may not be familiar with those subjects and could be embarrassed by his or her lack of knowledge.

Business Attire

When packing for your trip, keep in mind that Thailand has a very hot and humid climate. Lightweight clothing in natural fibres will work best, depending on the time of year.

For men, business suits and ties are expected. Short-sleeve shirts are acceptable in the summer, when jackets and ties can often be removed. Follow your counterparts' lead. Men may also wear safari suits (usually grey or khaki) but never at a first meeting. For women, simple suits or professional dresses are appropriate.

For outdoor activities and very cold air-conditioned environments, it is advisable to take along blazers, sweaters, and suit jackets.

Women will be most comfortable in lightweight dresses or skirts and blouses (with sleeves) for almost all occasions. Note that it is acceptable for women not to wear hosiery because of the heat. However, makeup should be worn. The colour black should be avoided, because it is the colour associated with death.

Men will do well with trousers, white shirts, and ties for business situations. Some restaurants require jackets, so a sport coat or suit jacket is also recommended.

Recognise that the better dressed you are, the higher status you give yourself.

Casual wear is not suitable for Thailand's better restaurants. Loose, neat comfortable clothing is appropriate for casual settings.

Avoid wearing solid purple as the colour is associated with the royal family.

Making Contacts

Foreign companies may write directly to Thai companies, although introductions will always facilitate a firm's credibility and acceptance. Because English telephone conversations may be difficult to understand for the Thai, it is best to write. As a result of the *sanuk*, or the carefree way of life, spontaneity is acceptable and appreciated. Sometimes it is all right to schedule impromptu meetings. However, this is not advisable on your first visit to Thailand.

Foreign businesses would be wise to hire a local representative or agent, especially if they intend to buy from or sell to Thailand. The commercial office of your embassy or your country's chamber of commerce can help a firm to identify credible representatives and partners. Assess any local representative or partner's political relationships as the government is still very much involved in the private sector. Networking with government officials can be the key to doing business successfully, especially if your firm intends to do a major project.

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The Board of Investment (BOI) is the principal Thai government agency responsible for providing incentives to attract foreign investment. The BOI also conducts promotion activities, both in Thailand and in various other countries. The BOI produces literature that is a good initial source for researching Thailand. A firm should also seek the advice of the commercial branch of its country's state department and the chambers of commerce.

Making Appointments

Avoid business visits during the New Year Festivals (both the Chinese and the Thai ones). Foreigners are expected to be punctual, but do not expect Thais to be on time. Heavy traffic is the most common excuse for tardiness. Whenever possible, avoid scheduling meetings after 3:30 P.M. because locals often leave their offices early to get a head start on evening rush-hour traffic. First meetings may be held in offices, restaurants, or hotel lobbies. Men may be invited to "member clubs." Thais are often impressed if you stay at an expensive hotel; luxury suggests that you represent a very successful company.

Most businesses and government offices are open weekdays from 8:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M., with an hour lunch break at noon, during which time the government offices actually close. Banks are open weekdays from 8:30 A.M. to 3:30 P.M. Department stores are open daily from 9 A.M. to 9 P.M.

Begin initial meetings with casual conversation on such topics as your travels and your counterpart's overseas experiences. Thais may ask what Westerners perceive as

very personal questions regarding income and status. If you are uncomfortable responding to such questions, politely offer a vague answer. Avoid topics relating to politics, the royal family, and religion. Be generous in your praise of the country and the Thai people and refrain from boasting about your country and yourself. Gifts are not required for early meetings. If you wish, you can present sample products from your company.

It is illegal to criticise the monarchy or the government. The Thais strictly enforce this law. Members of the royal family should always be publicly respected. Standing over someone, especially someone older or more superior, is considered rude as it implies social superiority. Westerners and other foreigners who are tall may find it difficult to avoid towering over smaller Thais. One possible way to deal with the problem is to slightly lower your head and upper body rather than standing erect. While it may not make much of a difference physically, the gesture is usually noticed and appreciated.

Never show the sole of your foot to anyone, for example, by placing your feet up on a table or chair. Never touch someone with your feet. The Thais, like many Asians, regard feet as unclean. It is usually considered rude to cross your legs, so it is best to sit erect with both feet on the ground. Refrain from touching any-one or even the chairs that they are sitting on; both gestures are considered rude. When passing an object, never toss it to a Thai. Always hand it to him or her directly.

Pointing to someone should be done by gesturing with the head or chin, not by using a finger. While it is acceptable to

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point, it is best to avoid this gesture entirely. Beckoning should be done using your whole hand with the palm facing down and the fingers pointing away from you but moving toward you in a scratching motion.

Corporate Structure

The typical business is headed by the managing director or general manager, whose immediate subordinates are directors and managers. In most companies, the more senior officers retain the authority and responsibility. Many of the country's largest businesses are owned and operated by people of Chinese or Sino-Thai heritage. As in most Asian countries, family links remain an important part of the business culture. Many Thai firms are centralised and have a hands-on style of management.

Over the years, many of Thailand's senior military leaders have gained control of private companies. Technically, other family members may "own" the company, but they are fronts for their relative in the military, who makes all the important decisions.

Punctuality

A lot of miscommunication has been caused because Thai time is divided into four- to six-hour segments, rather than 12-hour time frames, if you asked to arrange a meeting at 10 a.m., your Thai contact will interpret it as a 4 a.m. meeting.

Of course, many Thais are accustomed to interacting with individuals outside Thailand who are on a 12-hour dock.

However, it may be better to clarify times, rather than risk having people show up at two different times.

Although Thais believe in punctuality, heavy traffic can cause them to be late for meetings, so be prepared for this possibility.

Meetings

You will have a much better chance of meeting with high-ranking officials if you schedule your meetings prior to arriving in Thailand.

The reason you have requested a meeting should be made clear early in the appointment. Provide presentation literature that has been translated into Thai, as well as letters from other companies that have worked with you in the past or are currently working with you.

Keep in mind that the Thais are a bit less formal than others when conducting business. However, obvious breeches of Thai etiquette will be considered rude and will hurt your efforts.

Asking if there are any questions or opinions from your Thai associates should be done in an indirect manner. Blunt questioning is considered bad form.

The Thai team will want to meet several times with you and your team, as well as with you alone, before making any final decisions.

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In Thailand, it is assumed that the first person that enters the room is the head of the group. Visitors should observe this convention so as not to confuse the Thais. Important guests are usually escorted to their seats. If the meeting room has a large central table, the principal guest is likely to be seated directly opposite the principal host.

When exchanging business cards, hold out your card with your right hand with the writing facing the recipient. Cards should always be exchanged individually (one-on-one). Never toss or "deal" your business card across the table, as this is considered extremely rude. Receive a business card with both hands and scan it immediately for the vital information. Then lay the card in front of you during that first meeting. It is demeaning to put someone's card directly into your pocket without looking at it first.

Meetings begin with small talk. Avoid the temptation to get down to business right away. Resist telling American-style jokes, because jokes sometimes do not translate across cultures and can cause confusion or hurt feelings.

Seating Etiquette

In Thailand, expect the man hosting the meal to sit next to his male guest. Similarly, the hostess will sit next to her female guest.

Negotiation

In general, doing business is a lengthy, drawn-out process because the concept of time in Thailand is very elastic. Do not expect quick decisions and do not expect to finalise

transactions with dispatch. You may need to visit Thailand two to three times before your proposal will be seriously considered. Different Thai ethnic groups conduct business differently; the education level and degree of international exposure of your counterparts will often affect their attitudes and styles.

The Thais are focused on hierarchies and respect all forms of authority. Thai society operates by the unspoken rule never to directly oppose or to embarrass anyone. Decisions are usually made by senior management, although who makes decisions can depend on the type and size of the transaction.

Thais place a great importance on appearances, politeness, and maintaining a calm professional composure or *jai yen* (cool heart). Never lose your temper publicly, for both you and your counterpart will lose face. If you do have an outburst, use a smile to mitigate the effects of any negative situation.

Maintaining group harmony and avoiding conflict are critical to the Thais. Never criticise anyone or his or her ideas publicly; this would be viewed as a personal attack. Since Thais rarely criticise, it can be very difficult to obtain honest feedback about your business ideas, proposals, and products. Thais will also rarely if ever say no directly. Further, in an effort to maintain harmony, Thais may not give you negative news or alert you to problems. To counter this problem, ask indirect questions, particularly those that can be answered affirmatively, but have a negative meaning.

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The Thais' favourite saying, *Maiden rai*, which means, "Never mind, it doesn't matter," often applies to business issues. Accordingly, Thais tend to be less concerned about meeting deadlines and general productivity than most Westerners. In relation to the concept of *sanuk*, Thais tend to enjoy spontaneity and care less for excessive planning. Thai unwillingness to focus on accountability, tasks, and responsibilities can make it difficult to document working relationships and to keep business moving forward. This casual attitude also encourages lower-level workers to be careless in their approach to details.

It is important to use your local representative or agent to keep Thai attention focused on your transaction on a regular basis. The cliché "out-of-sight, out-of-mind" is very valid in Thailand. Further, it is not uncommon for a Thai to say that he will be in touch and then not follow up. You should make efforts to maintain ongoing communication.

The Thais view contracts merely as an early step in developing a relationship. Therefore, they may be offended by an extensively detailed contract; this would imply that the Thai's honour is questionable. Be sensitive to such issues when you draw up agreements. In any case, you should focus on your business objectives and include the appropriate level of details in order to avoid problems in the case of a dispute. Outline how disagreements should be handled. Contracts are usually written in Thai as well as English.

Entertaining

Thais enjoy combining business and pleasure. Business breakfasts are not very common. If you schedule a breakfast meeting, the better hotels are appropriate settings. Business lunches and dinners are more common. As a general rule, who-ever extends the invitation pays for the meal and the entertainment. Thais call splitting a bill "American share" and rarely engage in it. If it is unclear who has extended the invitation, then the oldest member of the group usually accepts "the honour" of paying. If you are the only foreigner at the table, it might be a good diplomatic gesture to offer to pay; generosity is always respected and appreciated.

It is not uncommon for Thais to bring liquor with them to a restaurant. Toasts are drunk to the relationship's success, not to individuals. Wait until your Thai counterpart mentions business before discussing it over a meal.

Thais use chopsticks only for Chinese dishes. In all other situations, they use a fork and spoon. The fork is used to push the food onto the spoon. When you are finished, place your fork and spoon together at the lower right side of the plate; otherwise, it will be assumed that you want more. Never pass food with just the left hand as it is considered unclean.

While there are laws against prostitution in Thailand, the government has been lax in enforcing them. Most Thais are tolerant of prostitution and consider extramarital relations for men an integral part of life. Foreign men should feel comfortable about turning down the offer of a female "escort," a visit to a "massage parlour," and related activities. Despite the relaxed private attitudes about sex, refrain from public displays of affection between adults. Discretion is viewed as

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a sign of maturity. The Thais enjoy gambling and related activities.

If you are invited to lunch, expect it to last two hours (that is, from 1 to 3 p.m.). This meal is typically for establishing rapport and developing relationships, which may take time.

Similarly, when you are invited to dinner, prepare to dine for a few hours (7 to 10 p.m., for example). Thai businesspeople want to know that they are compatible with you personally before developing a business relationship. The way you interact with them and the *sanuk* (fun) you have together during both business and social situations will be a determining factor in doing business with you.

Just as in many other parts of the world, whoever extends the invitation for the meal picks up the cheque,

When going to a restaurant, take your own alcohol.

Sometimes even taking food is acceptable. Thais tend to eat dinner early, just as many *farangs* (foreigners) do (6 p.m. or so). If you plan on going to a Thai-owned restaurant, check the time it closes, because it is common for some of them to close earlier than you might expect (8 or 9 p.m., for example).

Be ready to eat when you visit Thailand! Believe it or not, Thai meals can consist of eight to nine courses-and spicy ones at that. In most restaurants, you will be seated at a revolving tabletop, allowing you to sample many tasty dishes.

Each person will be served a plate of rice. The community plates will include fish, pork, vegetable, and meat dishes. It is appropriate for someone to offer you a helping of one type of food at a time. In turn, you should reciprocate the favour for the person by placing food from one dish onto his or her plate over rice.

Thai manners dictate that you begin eating as soon as you are served, although it is appropriate for guests to wait for the host or hostess to take the first bite.

Most food is served to you in small pieces, so you will not be served a knife, only a fork and spoon. The fork, which should remain in your left hand, acts as a scooper for the food going into the spoon, which should remain in your right hand. If you have to cut something, it is appropriate to use the side of your spoon rather than the side of your fork to do so.

In areas of Thailand other than Bangkok, it is common for only a spoon to be used. Any additional assistance may come from the fingers of your right hand.

While in some Asian countries it is appropriate to wait for someone to serve you, if you are ready for more in Thailand, you may help yourself rather than wait to be offered the food.

In many other countries, serving utensils are offered, but this may not be the case in some Thai restaurants or even in some homes. It is often considered acceptable for a person to serve him- or herself using a used or unused spoon.

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When eating, it is considered appropriate to eat a spoonful of rice and then another food, rather than first eating all the rice followed by all of something else.

If you are eating rice that sticks together, you may pick up the rice with your hands, form a ball, and eat it.

Note that the only time you will use chopsticks in Thailand is when you are eating noodles.

To drink soup or broth, do not lift the bowl and slurp it. Rather, use your spoon to sip it.

While individuals from some Asian countries eat in silence, it is appropriate in Thailand to make small talk while eating.

It is considered an honour to be offered the last helping in a serving dish. The proper etiquette is to wait until you are offered the serving and then tactfully decline the first time. If it is offered to you a second time and you want it, you may then accept it.

The last course that will be served to you is fried rice. As a way of displaying that you are content, it is better to leave it untouched.

Gift-giving

Corruption is widespread, particularly among the military and government officials, many of whom abuse their powers to enrich themselves. Most of the coups have been prompted in part by the corruption of the governments then in power.

Avoid direct engagement in any questionable activity. The Thais prefer discretion and few will speak openly about the bribes or "commissions" they require to accomplish tasks. Your local representative or agent is much better suited to managing the subtle nuances of such issues.

In normal interactions, it is appropriate to present a small gift as the relationship develops. Thais usually focus on the thought behind the gift and less on the gift itself. Appropriate gifts are home country souvenirs, liquor, flowers, or sweets. Gifts should not be opened in the presence of the giver.

While in some Asian countries it is considered appropriate to exchange gifts at the first meeting, this is not the case in Thailand. Generally, gifts will be exchanged at a subsequent meeting. Be sure to bring a few gifts with you so that you are prepared. Your gifts may be quality brand name pens, pictures, or something that may be made in your home city.

When receiving a gift, thank the person for it and then set it aside. Do not open it in front of the giver, but wait until you are alone.

It is appropriate to bring a thoughtful gift, particularly something representative of your town or region, to a business meeting or social event. Gifts indicate that you are interested in building a relationship. A gift should always be wrapped, but avoid plain black or white paper because these are the colours of mourning. Present the gift with both hands as a sign of courtesy and always mention that this is only a small token of appreciation. Do not expect your gift to be

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opened in your presence. This indicates that it is the thought that counts more than the material value.

Be conscious of rank when you give gifts. The leader should receive a better gift. If several people are involved and you are unsure about the hierarchy, give the group a joint gift. Make sure to remove labels such as "Made in China," before you wrap it.

Never give sharp objects such as knives or scissors as they would signify the cutting of a relationship. Never give a handkerchief as it suggests tears or parting.

Tipping Tips

Tipping is common only in tourist areas. Note that leaving just one baht in Thailand is like leaving a penny for a server in the United States. If you are going to tip, try to be generous.

Carry loose change for tipping; however, never leave only 1 baht as that would be considered an insult.

While most restaurants build in a 10-percent service charge, it is appropriate, although not necessary, to leave an extra 10 to 20 baht on the table.

If you have negotiated a price in advance with the driver, a tip is unnecessary. Usually, they have already added a tip in the fare.

Hotel bellboys and room-service waiters should get between 10 and 50 baht. Concierges normally receive between 50 and 100 baht. Restaurants include a 10 percent service charge.

For skycaps at the Bangkok International Airport and hotel porters, a tip of 5 to 10 bahts (20 to 40 cents) per bag is appropriate.

If You are Invited to a Thai home.

The majority of entertaining will be conducted in public settings, such as restaurants, but if you are invited to a Thai home, consider it an honour. Before entering the home, check to see if your Thai host is wearing shoes. If not, be sure to also remove yours. Just as you should when entering a temple, step over the threshold rather than stepping on it.

Invitations to homes for just one or two people are rare. The Thais tend to invite groups of people to their homes, usually for an informal buffet meal. If you are invited to a Thai home, remove your shoes before entering (also remove shoes before entering a temple).

Some Thais are tolerant of Western habits. Follow your host's lead. Avoid stepping on the doorsill of a home (or temple), for the Thais believe that souls reside in doorsills. It is customary to bring a small gift when visiting a home, although it is not required.

It is not absolutely necessary to take a gift. However, it is common practice to go with a small token or with flowers. Tulips and roses are appreciated, but marigolds and carnations are equated with funerals.

Unlike in other Asian countries, where it may be construed as a romantic gesture, perfume makes an excellent and much-

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appreciated gift for a Thai hostess. Your Thai host may appreciate a tie or a bottle of good liquor.

Presentation counts a great deal. A beautifully wrapped gift will leave a very favourable impression.

Thais consider odd numbers to be lucky, while even numbers are unlucky. This is something to remember should you give multiple gifts

Suitable gifts include souvenirs and handicrafts from your home country, sweets, baskets of fruit, flowers, and chocolates. Always wrap your gifts in brightly coloured paper, as the Thais enjoy bright colours. In some traditional homes, people sit on the floor. Women tuck their legs to one side and men sit cross-legged. Never stretch your legs out in front of you. Be careful not to praise a specific object or your host may feel obliged to present it to you. Rather, compliment the home overall or the children. Thais are generally very hospitable and warm.

Buddhist shrines and religious objects are sacred, so refrain from using them as a backdrop for your photographs. Women are not permitted to touch Buddhist monks. The head is considered the most sacred part of the body and should never be touched due to the belief that the spirit, *khwan*, resides in the head.

Although praise is appropriate, be very conservative when complimenting or commenting on an object in the home you are visiting because your Thai host may feel obliged to give it to you.

Women in Business

Although doing business with men is more common in Thailand, a woman who looks the part and acts it will be taken more seriously. Therefore, dressing well and conservatively is important.

Women should realise that a Thai man may wait to initiate a handshake with her, therefore, she should extend her hand first.

Respect is important, especially for monks. Women should never touch a monk or hand him an object directly.

While it may be acceptable for a 'Western' businesswoman to extend a dinner invitation to her male client's spouse, this is not the case in Thailand.

Important Advice

- Don't enter a Buddhist temple wearing shoes or a hat.
- Don't respond to 'Where are you going?' by giving your itinerary for the day. A proper response would be "Down the street."
- Don't motion for someone to come to you by waving your fingers. Instead, do it with palms half closed, moving them towards you.
- Don't put a banknote in your shoe.

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- Don't raise your voice if you get upset. Maintaining harmony at all costs is an important part of the Thai culture.
- Don't touch a Buddha or monk. It is a sign of disrespect.
- Don't sit in the last row of a bus. These seats are reserved for monks.
- When establishing a business venture, your Thai partners will first want to establish a personal relationship with you. This will be done over many delicious meals and socialising evenings."
- Although Thais appear to be shy and retiring, they are formidable businesspeople not to be underestimated.

Never touch someone's head, or pass an object over it. The head is considered sacred, where Thai tradition says the spirit resides.

When sitting, it is considered offensive to cross the legs, especially in the presence of an older person or high-ranking official. Feet are considered the lowest part of the body. Avoid putting your feet on the table, using your foot to point at anyone or to push an object.

When you visit a temple, do not wear shorts. Females should wear long skirts and avoid wearing sleeveless blouses. It is advisable to show respect for religious statues and other religious objects as 95 percent of the Thais are Buddhists.

Never criticise the King or the Royal family. Avoid talking politics or religion. Good topics: where to find good Thai food and places one should visit.

If a Thai person gives you a compliment, it is polite to deny it graciously. Modesty is highly valued Thailand.

Thais point at objects with an open right hand and do not use the index finger. Beckoning to someone is done with a palm facing down. Avoid beckoning with your index finger facing up (this is to call a dog).

Do not try too hard to "go Thai." Thais do not expect you to know all of their etiquette, and they make allowances for foreigners. Keep the above guidelines in mind, but above all, be yourself.

Thai Food

The cuisine of Thailand, one of the most coherent in Southeast Asia, is an integrated, harmonious whole, following definite rules, selecting with care the foreign ideas it will accept and catering to the eye as well as the palate. Thai is one of the world's most exciting cuisines, and if you're willing to experiment, you'll be richly rewarded. Thai Cuisine is in a class of its own. It does not really resemble any other cuisine of the world, though if it is to be described by being compared to the cuisine of other countries one could say that it is somehow a blend between **Chinese** and **Indian**.

Contrary to popular belief, not all Thai food is fiery hot; and there are plenty of tasty dishes suited to the Western palate. This hybrid cuisine has been influenced by soups and noodle

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dishes from China, curries from India and satays from Indonesia. Most dishes incorporate four elements: sweet, sour, salty and hot flavours.

Seafood, coconuts, tropical fruits, rice, tapioca, cane sugar, mushrooms, bananas and shrimp are plentiful foods.

Thai cuisine varies in different regions of the country. Meals in the north are somewhat milder than in the central plains; north-eastern food is fiery hot. Seafoods are most common in the south and the Muslim communities of the deep south are partial to all kinds of curries.

Many spices and herbs are used in Thai food such as hot peppers, garlic, coriander, ginger, onions and curries. These hot tastes are often offset by steamed rice (eaten at almost every meal), mild noodle dishes, sweet Thai teas and coffees, sweet desserts and fruits.

A feature shared with Chinese cuisine are the staple foods, **rice** and **noodles**. A similarity to Indian cuisine are **curries** though Thai curries often are prepared without coconut milk.

Khao rice
Nua beef
Mu pork
Kai chicken
Khai egg
Pet duck
Pla fish
Kung shrimp
Pu crab meat
Phak vegetables

Curries

Kaeng curry

Kaeng mat sa man a rich beef curry with peanuts, not spicy

Kaeng ka ri a mild flavored Indian type curry made with potatoes and most commonly chicken though sometimes other meats are used

Kaeng kai chicken curry

Kaeng nua beef curry

Kaeng pla duk catfish curry

Kaeng som fish and vegetable curry

Soups

Kaeng chut a mild flavored soup made of vegetables and/or shrimp, chicken and pork

Kaeng chut wun sen the same as kaeng chut but with shredded jelly

Kaeng liang a typical Thai style vegetable soup

Tom yam a chili hot and sour soup made with pork, shrimp, beef, chicken or fish

Tom indicating that a dish is boiled

Khao tom mu a mild rice soup flavored with pork

Khao tom pla a mild rice soup flavored with fish

Khao tom kung a mild rice soup flavored with shrimp

Tom khlong salted fish boiled with tamarind and onions

Pet tun steamed duck soup

Khao phot corn soup

Hu cha lam sai pu shark fin soup with crab meat

Egg Dishes

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Khai egg

Khai luak soft boiled egg

Khai tom hard boiled egg

Khai dao fried egg

Khai tot omelette

Khai tot sai mu omelette filled with pork

Khai yat sai omelette filled with meat, onions and sugar peas

Po pia an egg roll containing bean sprouts, pork and crab meat (not fried)

Po pia tot an egg roll containing bean sprouts, pork, crab meat (fried)

Fried Dishes

Khao rice

Khao phat fried rice

Pla tot fried fish

Kai tot fried chicken

Kai phat phrik fried chicken and chillies

Kai yang roasted chicken

Kung tot krob crisp fried prawns

Priao wan sweet and sour pork with vegetables

Phak kung phat Thai fried vegetables made with morning glory stems and leaves

Hae kun thin slices of shrimp eaten with a side order of Chinese syrup

Mi klob crisp thin noodles (vermicelli) with bits of meat, shrimp and egg and sweet and sour sauce

Nua phat nam man hoi fried beef with oyster-flavored sauce and green onion

Dok kalam phat mu (kung, kai, nua) fried pork (shrimp, chicken, beef) with cauliflower

Miscellaneous

Pla priao wan sweet and sour fried fish

Kam pu tot fried crab claws

Kam pu nung steamed crab claws

Salad nua san roast beef salad

Pla nam khao stewed fish in white sauce

Rice Dishes

Khao rice

Rat khao any dish served over rice; ordinary Thai restaurants sell their dishes either in portions big enough for several eaters or as rat khao, a serving over rice portioned for one person

Khao man kai sliced chicken served with plain rice

Khao na pet sliced roast duck with plain rice

Khao na kai sliced chicken with bamboo shoots and spring onions in a gravy over plain rice

Khao mu daeng sliced cooked pork with egg and gravy over plain rice

Khao mu tot sliced fried pork over plain rice (can be ordered with khai, egg, added on top)

Khao rat na nua fried vegetables and beef in a gravy over plain rice

Noodle Dishes

Nam literally meaning water, is used to indicate a soup dish

Haeng literally just meaning dry, is used to indicate that a dish is without broth

Kuai tiao rice noodles

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Ba mi wheat and egg noodles

Kuai tiao lat na wide white noodles with meat, vegetables and gravy placed on top

Kuai tiao haeng white noodles flavored with a small amount of meat, vegetables (preferably bean sprouts) and spices

Kuai tiao nam same as above, but with a broth added

Kuai tiao phat Thai thin white noodles fried with bean sprouts and a small quantity of many other ingredients including meats

Kuai tiao phat si iu sai khai noodles fried with Chinese sauce, meat, vegetables and egg

Ba mi nam boiled wheat and egg noodles with broth

Ba mi haeng same as above but without broth

Ba mi na mu (nua, kai, kung, pu) fried yellow noodles with pork (beef, chicken, shrimp, crab meat)

Ba mi na phak same as above, but with vegetables

Ba mi krob rat na kung crisp fried yellow noodles with shrimp

Ba mi krob rat na mu same as above but with pork

Ba mi krob rat na kai same as above, but with chicken

Kieo nam wonton (meat ball) soup

Kieo haeng wonton with bits of vegetables and spices

Useful Thai Expressions

Do learn a few words of Thai. This shows an interest in your host's language and culture. It is also a very good icebreaker.

The official language is Thai, which is monosyllabic and tonal. Using the proper tone is important; the same word may have different meanings depending on the tone. Of the

many Thai dialects, Central Thai is the official dialect of the government and business. It is important to note that there are different phrases when referring to men rather than women. Additionally, Thai men and women use different versions of phrases when speaking. For example, women end greetings or questions with *kha* instead of *khrap*. English is widely spoken in business. The script is written from left to right with no spaces between the words. The transliteration of Thai script into roman characters will vary depending on the translator because spelling is not standardised. The following list includes some useful phrases written as they would be pronounced.

Bake	ob
Beef	neua
Beer	beer
Boil	tom
Bread	ka-nom-pang
Broil	luark
Bus	rod-mail
Cheers	Khaw uay phawn (rarely used)
Cheese	cheese
Chicken	kai
Chocolate	chocolate
Coffee	cah-fey
Dessert	kha-nom-waan
Excuse me	Khaw thoat
Fish	pla
Fry	tode
Good afternoon	Same as hello

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Good evening/night	Same as hello or Ra-tree sa-wat
Good morning	Same as hello or Aroon sa-wat
Goodbye	sa-was-dee
Good-bye	Di-chan khaw laa kha (used by females); phom khaw laa khrap (used by males)
Ham	ham
Hello	Sa-wat-dee khrap (used by males); Sa-wat-dee kha (used by females) In general, use khrap after a phrase for men, and kha for women.
Help	chuay
Here is my business card	An nee kher bat naam khawng phom (used by males); An nee kher bat naam khawng di-chan (used by females)
How are you?	Sa-baay dee rer kha (used by females); Sa-baay dee rer khap (used by males)
How Much Does This Cost	ra-ka-tao-rai
I am pleased to meet	Phom yin-dee thee

you	dye phop kap khoon khrap (used by males); Di- chan yin-dee thee dye phop kap khoon kha (used by females)
I am sorry	(as in I am saddened) Phom siyeh chye (used by males); Di-chan siyeh chye (used by females)
I look forward to developing a good relationship with you/your firm	Phom mee khwaam wang thee cha sang sam phan tha-phap thee dee kap than/baw-ri-sat khawng than khrap (used by males); Di- chan mee khwaam wang thee cha saang sam phan tha/phaap thee dee kap than/baw-ri-sat khawng than kha (used by females)
I understand	Phom khao chye khrap (used by males); Di-chan khao chye kha (used by females)
I work for	Phom tham ngaanyoo thee (used by

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	males); Di-chan tham ngaanyoo thee (used by females)
It Is Nice To Meet You	yin-dee-thee-ru-jak
Lamb	kae
Left	sai
Middle	klang
Milk	nom
My name is	Phom cher
No, I do not understand	Mye, phom mye khao chye khrap (used by males); Mye, di-chan mye khao chye kha (used by females)
Please	kob-khun
Please	Ka-roo-na (with a request)
Please accept this small gift	Phom khaw mawp khawng khwan lek-lek noy-noy khrap (used by males); Di-chan khaw
Please wait a minute	Proat raw sak khroo
Police	?
Pork	moo
Potato	mun-fa-rang
Purified Water	num-plour
Rice	kao
Right	kwaa
Salad	sa-lad
Soup	soup
Street	ta-nont

Subway	sub-way
Take Me To My Hotel	pa-pai-ron-gram
Taxi	taxi
Tea	cha
Thank you	Khawp khoon
Train	rod-fai
Under	tai
Veal	neua-look-wua
Vegetable	pak
Where Is The Bathroom	hong-num-u-nai
You are welcome	Mai pen rai

General Information

Capital: Bangkok

Area: 513,115 km²

Population: 62.4 million (July 2002 est.)

Currency: Baht

(Cdn\$1 = 30.45 Baht) May 30, 2003

Language: Thai, Chinese

Type of Government: Constitutional Monarchy

Head of State: H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej (King Rama IX)

Prime Minister: Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra

Economic Data (2002):

GDP: US\$ 126.4 billion

Per Capita GDP: US\$ 1,988.5

GDP Growth Rate: 3.5%

Inflation Rate: 0.6%

Geography

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The kingdom of Thailand, once known as the kingdom of Siam, is located in Southeast Asia, extends downward into the Malaysian Peninsula, and shares its southern border with Malaysia. To the north-east lies Laos, to the east Cambodia, and to the north-west Myanmar (Burma). With a total land area of 198,455 square miles (514,000 square kilometres), Thailand is about the same size as France. The country is characterised by tropical rain forests in the southern peninsular region, mountains in the north, and plains in the central region. The capital is Bangkok (also known as Krung Thep), which is located in about the middle of the country on the Gulf of Thailand and is the country's largest city. Chiang Mai, Thailand's second largest city, is located inland in the northern part of the country

Thailand's Relations with Neighbours

Foreign policy has focused primarily on enhancing increasingly close ties with ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) neighbours, China and India. Thailand is a founder member of ASEAN.

Thailand's biggest foreign policy challenge is Burma. The long, fluid border between the two countries sees large numbers of refugees, illegal immigrants and drugs pass from Burma into Thailand. There have been occasional cross border skirmishes between their respective armed forces and terrorist incidents, with several dozen deaths. The Thai/Burmese border was closed between May and October 2002 after one such incident. In December 2003 Thailand initiated the 'Bangkok Process' with Burma and other "Like Minded Countries" to take forward the process of National Reconciliation in Burma.

Relations with Cambodia deteriorated sharply in January when anti-Thai riots erupted in Phnom Penh leading to the burning down of the Thai Embassy and the premises of a number of Thai businesses. Relations have improved since then.

Thailand's Relations with the International Community

Thailand was a close ally of the West during the cold war and is a long-term member of the United Nations. It is increasingly active in the international arena and looks to maintain a balance between key partners: US, China, Japan, EU and ASEAN. Dr Supachai Panitchpakdi, a former Deputy Prime Minister, became the Secretary General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2002, a first for Thailand. Thai armed forces have undertaken peacekeeping duties in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, East Timor, Afghanistan, Aceh, Indonesia and more recently, Iraq. Thailand was granted partner status in the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in November 2000 and held a seat on the UN Commission on Human Rights from 2001-2003. The US granted Thailand the status of Major Non-NATO Ally in January 2004

Human Rights

Thailand has a generally good human rights record. It remains one of the liveliest democracies in the region. The military remains influential but, since 1992, has respected the principle of civilian rule. The Press, TV and radio stations are largely free. Demonstrations for or against the government are common. Several regional human rights NGOs are based in Bangkok and Thailand is a popular venue for international

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human rights meetings. But the Thai government's 'Campaign against Drugs' has attracted adverse international attention. Although official figures record the deaths of over 2600 people including over 40 killed by the police, the Thai authorities claim that only a small number of these individuals were killed by the police acting in self-defence and the remainder by rival drug gangs or by their own gang-leaders in fear of them turning informants. Senior Thai figures and NGOs are pressing for an explanation of the deaths. Public opinion in Thailand remains behind the campaign.

The Thai government has a good history of offering safe haven to Burmese refugees (currently 140,000 live in Thailand) but the Thai authorities been tempted on occasion to return refugees to unsafe areas of Burma and to refuse to allow other refugees to cross into Thailand to escape fighting in Burma.

The Thai government has used the death penalty as a high profile part of its fight against drugs. In 2002, there were 11 executions, mostly for drugs related offences. There were four executions in 2003 for murder and drugs related offences. In October 2003 lethal injection replaced shooting as Thailand's method of execution.

Thailand's new Constitution, adopted in October 1997, was a major step forward for human rights. It created or strengthened independent agencies designed to suppress corruption and protect citizens against abuses of government power, e.g. the Election Commission, National Counter Corruption Commission and National Human Rights Commission. It reinforced judicial independence, and transformed the Senate from an appointed to a directly

elected body, with stronger powers of oversight. Of the six core UN human rights treaties, Thailand has ratified five. This leaves only the Convention against Torture.

Elephants

Elephant riding can be dangerous, and has been the cause of several serious accidents and at least one recent death of a British citizen.

History

Archaeological evidence indicates that Thailand has been occupied by human civilisations for more than five thousand years. When the ancestors of the modern Thai people began migrating into the region from Southern China around A.D. 700, they found the area already populated by the Mons, whose settlements stretched from Thailand through Myanmar to India, and the Khmers, the ancestors of the modern Cambodians. The Mons were Buddhist and the Khmers Hindu; both religions had an effect on the Thai belief system.

The history of modern Thailand began in the thirteenth century with the emergence of two principal Thai states: Sukhothai, founded in 1220, and Chiang Mai, founded in 1296. The Thai rebellion against the Khmers resulted in the creation of Sukhothai, which is regarded as the first historical Thai Kingdom. Little is known of Sukhothai until its third Thai king, Ramkhamhaeng, who ruled from 1278 through 1318. He is still revered as the "Father of Thailand" who made a significant contribution to Thai society by fusing the Mon and Khmer traditions. He also revised and adapted the

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Khmer alphabet to the Thai language. Ramkhamhaeng's kingdom began to decline in the mid-fourteenth century and was eventually absorbed by the kingdom of Ayutthaya in 1378. During the same period, other Thai peoples migrated to present-day Laos and the Shan states of Burma.

The Ayutthaya kingdom began in 1350 and lasted until 1768. It was ruled by thirty-three successive kings. During this Ayutthaya period, the concept of the king as a god was introduced and elaborate royal rituals were adopted. Ramathibodi, the founder of the Ayutthaya line of kings, invited Ceylonese monks to purify the Khmer-corrupted religion of Theravada Buddhism. The resulting Thai form of Buddhism is still in practice today. In the fourteenth century, the Ayutthaya kingdom extended its range into parts of Cambodia, eventually occupying its capital of Angkor. By the end of the fourteenth century, the Ayutthaya kingdom was the strongest power in Southeast Asia, but it lacked the manpower to maintain control over the region.

In 1569, the Burmese overran Ayutthaya, although they were eventually displaced by the Thai king Naresuan, who restored independence to the kingdom by 1600. During the following period, Ayutthaya enjoyed a golden age of arts and architecture. The Burmese attacked Ayutthaya again in 1765. After almost two years of resistance by the Thais, the Burmese captured the capital city, slaughtered most of the population, plundered the treasures, and completely burned the royal city, thereby destroying the architectural heritage of Ayutthaya. The Thais were devastated and still have animosity toward the Burmese because of this outrage.

By 1767, the Thais regrouped under the guidance of a half-Chinese general named Phraya Taksin, who rallied the nation and established a new capital in Thonburi near modern-day Bangkok. Within ten years, Taksin drove the Burmese out of Thailand. Further, Taksin brought large areas of Laos under Thai influence. Taksin was overthrown in an army coup. General Chao Phraya Chakri became the first king of the Chakri dynasty and was crowned as Rama I in 1782. This period, known as Rattanakosin, continues to the present day. Rama I initiated a new period of Thai expansionism. In the early nineteenth century, the Thais seized provinces in Cambodia, resulting in tension with Vietnam. This was resolved by both countries agreeing to establish a joint protectorate over Cambodia.

During the nineteenth century, Thai kings were successful in using diplomacy to keep out the British and the French. Thailand's continued independence was finally secured in the mid-to late-nineteenth century by ceding to the British a little of what is now and to the French a little of what is now Cambodia and Laos.

One of the more successful Thai kings, noted for his ability to use diplomacy to keep foreigners out of the country, was King Mongkut (Rama IV), who ruled from 1851 to 1868. King Mongkut was an enlightened and well-educated ruler who understood that the only way to maintain political independence was through the introduction of Western-style reforms. (Many Westerners are familiar with King Mongkut as he is the monarch in the story, *The King and I*.) He and his son, Chulalongkorn (Rama V), are credited with transforming Thailand from a medieval kingdom into a modern nation. Chulalongkorn ruled from 1868 to 1910 and

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was successful in abolishing the slave-like status of serfs, developing the educational system, expanding professional opportunities, restructuring the administrative system, and introducing other reforms.

Rama VII, who reigned from 1925 to 1935, attempted to provide the country with a modern constitution. However, fervent royalists prevented him from instituting this reform. In 1932, a coalition of Thailand's military and a group of radical civilians committed to social, political, and economic reform, staged a bloodless coup and installed a constitutional regime with the king's acceptance. After a year of infighting among the civilian and military factions, the military coalition assumed full control.

In 1939, the country was renamed Thailand, meaning "Land of the Free." Phibun Songkhram, a Thai military leader, assumed the prime minister's office, promoted Thai nationalism and encouraged Thai social behaviour that conformed to Western standards. In 1941, the Phibun government co-operated closely with the occupying Japanese troops. The Phibun military regime was replaced in 1944 by a predominantly civilian government.

After the end of World War II, political infighting and economic hardship led to five civilian prime ministers and eight civilian cabinets within a two-year period. The military once again challenged the civilian government. In 1947, Phibun's military faction backed two generals who seized power from the civilian government. In 1948, Field Marshall Phibun Songkhram assumed the office of prime minister and took full control of the government.

The king remains a focus of loyalty and cohesion and his support has always been necessary for the transfer of power either through coups or elections. Nevertheless, Thailand's generals have remained the real power brokers. The pre-sent king, H. M. Bhumibol Adulyadej, who has ruled since 1950, is known as Rama IX. Despite coups and other political upheavals, the country has managed to stay fairly focused on creating a modern economy.

For almost a decade, Phibun was successful in balancing the interests of the military, the bureaucrats, and the economically powerful Chinese. In 1957, as part of a cosmetic attempt to liberalise the country, he announced elections, which were subsequently rigged. Marshal Sarit Thanarat took control of the government in 1958 after a bloodless coup. Sarit imposed an authoritarian system and abolished elections and the constitution, outlawed political parties, and closed a dozen newspapers.

During the past fifty years, Thailand has often been the recipient of international aid due to its strategic location and its anticommunist beliefs. U.S. involvement in Vietnam provided Sarit and Thailand with an opportunity for economic expansion. During the 1960s, Thailand experienced extensive economic growth due in large part to American military expenditures. Further, the Thai government, fearful of communist attacks, aligned itself closely with the United States and permitted American forces to be stationed in Thailand.

After Sarit's death in 1963, Thanom Kittikachorn tried to re-establish the democratic process. He introduced a new constitution in 1968 that provided for a National Assembly

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with some elected members. However, in 1971, Thanom launched a coup against his own government and suspended the constitution and the National Assembly, thereby ending a three-year experiment with partial parliamentary democracy.

In December 1972, a new constitution called for an appointed legislative assembly, most of whom would be members of the military and police. This led to widespread student protests and violence. In October 1973, the government collapsed after the king withdrew his support and student protests escalated. A new 1974 constitution provided for democratic elections and led to several weak governments. The country was polarised between right-wing and left-wing groups with no political party able to win a majority or assemble a stable coalition. Meanwhile, the student movement became more radical which was attributed to communist influence. Most dissidents were labelled communists by the Thai military and right-wing politicians. On October 6, 1976, the military and police launched a bloody assault on student protesters, killing hundreds. Then the military seized power and ended Thailand's short experiment with true democracy. Thanin Kraivichien, a civilian, became prime minister with the support of the king and the military.

A passionate anticommunist, his government was more repressive than those of previous military strongmen. A year later, General Kriangsak Chamanand replaced Thanin and became prime minister. Under Kriangsak, a new constitution was written and the press was given limited freedoms.

The deterioration of the country's economy led to Kriangsak's resignation in 1980. Prem Tinsulanond, the army

commander in chief, became prime minister, thanks to the king's support. By then, refugees from neighbouring Kampuchea (Cambodia), fleeing Vietnam's invasion of that country, became an issue for Thailand. Although the military continued to exercise authority, Kriangsak and Prem both introduced some democratic reforms.

After the July 1988 elections, Prem stepped down from power. A six-party coalition won the majority of seats in the National Assembly and General Chatichai Choonhavan, leader of the Chart Thai (Thai Nation) party, became the prime minister and formed a cabinet. Chatichai shifted power from the military to the business elite and pursued aggressive pro-development policies. However, in February 1991, due to extensive corruption in the government, the military overthrew Chatichai's government in a bloodless coup. Suchinda Kraprayoon, a military leader, assumed control, although not in the official role of prime minister. Anand Panyarachun was appointed interim prime minister. His policies focused on liberalising and deregulating the economy.

Pro-democracy movements gained support and placed pressure on the military. In early 1992, new elections resulted in a government coalition of five pro-military parties, Samakkhi Tham, Chart Thai, the Social Action party, Prachakorn Thai, and Rassadorn. This coalition chose Narong Wongwan, a close aide of Suchinda, to be prime minister. However, he was an unacceptable choice, domestically and internationally, due to strong suspicions of involvement in heroin trafficking. Instead, Suchinda was appointed prime minister. Meanwhile, pro-democracy demonstrations against military manipulation of and participation in the government increased. On May 17, 1992, the government declared a

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national emergency and shot at demonstrators, killing at least one hundred people. Despite his attempt to retain power, Suchinda resigned one week later.

In June 1992, Anand Panyarachun was appointed as interim prime minister once again and moves were made to democratise the constitution. He quickly re-established stability and appointed a cabinet. Eventually the four political parties siding with the pro-democracy movement formed a coalition under Chuan Leekpai and received a majority in the National Assembly in the September 1992 elections. The pro-military party, Chart Thai, came in second. The 1993 elections confirmed the role of the pro-democracy coalition. Chuan Leekpai has focused on promoting social stability and economic growth. Chuan's administration was in power for two years and eight months, the longest for an elected government in Thai history. Chuan's government fell in 1995 over a land-reform scandal. In July 1995, Banharn Silpa-archa became prime minister. However, his administration was brought down a year later in September 1996 under accusations of inefficiency and corruption. A coalition government led by Chavalit Yingchaiyudh took over in November 1996.

Chavalit inherited a shaky economy and a political environment characterised by extensive corruption, patronage, and inefficiencies. While he vowed to re-vitalise and reform the country, by early 1997 the economy began its year-long nosedive as speculative attacks on the Thai *baht* weakened the currency.

Chavalit's administration was unsuccessful in countering the attacks on the economy. Much of the problem stemmed from

the economic boom between 1985 and 1995 when the country experienced high growth rates. A bubble economy had been created as the private sector borrowed extensively from foreign services but invested it domestically in unproductive industries, particularly real estate. Further, government regulators overlooked weak banking practices and authorised ill-conceived building projects in exchange for commissions. As 1997 progressed, corporate failures and layoffs became widespread and political activists expressed their frustrations through demonstrations. Under heavy pressure, Chavalit resigned in November 1997 and was replaced by Chuan Leekpai, a former prime minister.

Chuan's administration gained popularity at home and internationally due in large part to the sound handling of the economic crisis. His inner circle of advisors has consisted of younger technocrats who have less regard for the traditional cronyism that characterised Thai politics. They have begun to introduce policies to streamline the legislative process and encourage a more open and clean government. Ridding the economic and political systems of corruption remains a long-term challenge for the government.

Political Structure

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system. The bicameral legislature consists of the Senate, whose members are appointed to six-year terms by the king upon the recommendation of the prime minister, and the National Assembly, whose members are elected to four-year terms by the people. Both the Senate and the National Assembly elect the prime minister, who then selects his cabinet and leads the government. Since 1932 Thailand has

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experienced twenty-six coups and created thirteen constitutions. However, in recent years, transfer of power has been less violent and the country seems to be moving slowly toward democratic processes. Nevertheless, most administrations have not been successful in demonstrating staying power and have been brought down usually on charges related to corruption. The judiciary has been influenced by the British legal code.

The king, who functions as the head of state, provides stability in an unstable political world. Many Thais revere and trust the monarch as the true ruler of the country. Despite the various coups and subsequent transfers of power, the king has remained at the helm and is perceived as the symbol of national unity.

Economy

Until 1997, Thailand had enjoyed a half-century of economic growth characterised by increased foreign investment, followed by periods of slowdown, often caused by a waning or withdrawal of foreign investment. Since the mid-1970s, the government has encouraged foreign investment and the subsequent growth rate through 1997 had been impressive. Government intervention in the economy has concentrated on key sectors. Thailand's strong economic performance has placed heavy demands on its marginal infrastructure. The government is now focusing on improving the country's basic infrastructure, including port facilities, roads, communications networks, water treatment facilities, and power sources.

The year 1997 began with a series of speculative attacks on the currency. Despite some constructive moves by the Chavalit administration, the currency continued to plunge.

Over-extended companies led to increased levels of non-performing debt in the finance sector. By late June 1997, the government suspended sixteen finance companies with orders to merge or recapitalise. On July 2nd, the Thai baht was devalued, triggering a regional economic crisis. Thailand had already spent significant foreign-exchange reserves in defending earlier attacks on the currency and was in essence unable to stem the losses and was forced to go to the IMF for help.

The IMF put together a rescue package totalling \$17.2 billion in an effort to provide reserves and call for measures to stop the economic downturn. Among the terms were measures to deal with the insolvent finance companies, including a removal on limits of foreign ownership of financial institutions and plans to privatise state enterprises. Both issues have met with public opposition and will be an implementation challenge to the government. Despite concerns over some of the terms, the Chuan government has been in constant dialogue and adherence with the IMF terms, in contrast with Indonesia which continuously challenged the IMF. By Fall 1998, economic results were mixed. While there was a trade surplus in March, rising foreign exchange reserves and a strengthening of the baht, the continued crisis in the region, particularly Indonesia and Japan, had a negative effect on the Thai economy. Long-term sustainable recovery is still threatened by a lack of general liquidity, making it difficult for businesses to meet their operating needs. The rising unemployment threatens to challenge the

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country politically and economically. One emerging positive side-effect has been the appearance of a new group of entrepreneurs who were employed by failed companies and are now applying their experience and knowledge in starting new ventures.

Traditionally the economy has been agriculture-based. Today, manufacturing has become the primary force behind the economy, but shortage of skilled labour remains a constraint. About 62 percent of the population is employed in agriculture-related industries. Many work on the large rubber and coconut plantations in the southern peninsular region.

Thai industries include food processing, cement, consumer products, sugar, beer, tires, electronic goods, computer peripherals and components, and automobiles and auto parts. Major exports include textiles and clothing, electrical appliances, rice, fish products, computers and integrated circuits and parts, rubber, tapioca, leather products, footwear, and precious stones and jewellery. Major crops include rice, rubber, tobacco, cotton, jute, beans, sugar cane, maize, and tapioca. The country has had difficulties with drug trafficking, but the government is making efforts to control and halt it. Tourism is fast becoming a major national industry and a leading source of foreign exchange. In early 1998, the government declared an "Amazing Thailand" tourist campaign aimed at bringing some of the much needed foreign currency to the country.

People, Values, and Social Customs

The population of Thailand is about fifty-nine million. Almost 82 percent of the people are ethnic Thais, making the

country relatively racially homogeneous. The ethnic Thai can be divided into Central Thai, Thai Lao, and Southern Thai. There are four dialects of the Thai language, but they are somewhat mutually intelligible. Central Thai is the official dialect. Minority groups include Chinese, Malays, Mons, Khmers, Phuans, Indians, and recent refugees from Vietnam, Myanmar (Burma), Laos, and Cambodia.

The largest minority are the Chinese, constituting more than 12 percent of the population. The earliest Chinese immigrants were the Hokkiens, who came to Thailand in the eighteenth century to serve primarily as tax collectors for the royal family. The Teochews migrated to Thailand and became successful merchants. In the twentieth century, immigrants fleeing famine in China swelled Thailand's Chinese population. The Chinese in Thailand have flourished due to education, hard work, and the tight Chinese community network. Many of Thailand's largest companies are owned by Thai Chinese. Unlike the Chinese minorities in other Southeast Asian countries, the Chinese in Thailand have not become the focus of ethnic rivalries, perhaps because the high rate of intermarriage has made it difficult to distinguish between Chinese and Thai families. Sino-Thais often take Thai surnames and speak Thai rather than Chinese, further reducing the differences. Many members of Thailand's ruling elite admit to having some Chinese ancestry.

The primary religion is Theravada, practised by about 95 percent of the population. Some two million Malays in Thailand are Muslims. The Thais also practice ancestor worship. Other minority religions include Hinduism, Sikhism, and Christianity.

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Thailand is unique among Southeast Asian nations because its culture developed independent of Western colonialism. Consequently, the Thais are very protective of their independence.

Over the last two decades, the government has made increasing efforts to improve literacy and school enrolments, the success of which is evident in the country's 94 percent literacy rate. Thais now recognise education to be the key to future advancement and wealth.

Thais value harmony and mutual respect. Preserving the dignity of others, as well as their own, is very important to them. Thais tend to be rather tolerant due to their Buddhist faith. A common expression is *Mai pen rai*, which means "Never mind, it does not matter." Problems and setbacks are not considered very important. Some say that this attitude helps to explain why military coups have been so prevalent in Thailand. Any displays of anger or rude behaviour are frowned upon. All differences are expected to be resolved quietly and politely. Thais often judge everything by whether or not it is *sanuk* or pleasurable.

Social ranking is determined by a combination of lineage, education, and economic status. Social ranking is made evident in the different ways a Thai will refer to himself depending on his status vis-à-vis the status of the listener. Foreigners need not be concerned about correct usage as long as they use polite speech. Royalty is the most respected group and the Thai use a special honorific vocabulary when referring to the royal family or directly addressing them. The Thais have tremendous respect for the monarchy and consider any slander of it an indictable

offence. Hence, the film and play, *The King and I*, and the original book, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, have been banned in Thailand due to the perception that they are condescending.

The family remains an integral part of Thai life. In some parts of Thailand, the people still live together as large extended families; this is less common now in the major cities. Traditionally, wealth and making money were not viewed very favourably but this is changing. Protecting the family, maintaining harmony, and providing sufficient food for everyone were the most important goals. With the recent influx of foreigners, Thais have become more materialistic.

Thailand is known for having some very good con artists who often create elaborate and believable schemes. Foreigners would be well-advised to be careful about trusting strangers, particularly on the streets.

In general, women are considered inferior to men and do not receive equal treatment. It should be noted, however, that more women are holding professional and executive positions. Most women remain responsible for family matters and often manage the household finances. In many areas it is still acceptable for Thai men to continue having an unofficial second wife. Male extramarital relations are common.

Smiling

Thais smile often; the country is referred to as "the land of the smiles." However, a smile can imply various things

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depending on the circumstances. It is very important to smile often and in every situation; a smile is the most useful tool in this culture. Do not assume, however, that the situation is positive simply because a Thai person smiles.

Thai Holidays

Songkran

Songkran, the Thai New Year celebrated from April 13 to April 16, is the most important, the best known and the gayest of Thailand's festivals. To the Thai people, this festival is one of water throwing and although it has religious significance, it usually turns into great fun. Everyone gets soaking wet and since it is the hottest season of the year, the custom is quite refreshing.

Songkran is not only observed in Thailand but also in Burma, Laos and Cambodia.

The word Songkran is from the Sanskrit, meaning the beginning of a new solar year. The Thai calendar used to switch to a new year on April 13 but the date was changed to January 1 to bring the country in line with the rest of the world.

In some ways, Songkran resembles the Christian Easter with its feasts and processions of people wearing new clothes. Young and old dress in new attire and visit their Wat where food is offered to the monks. Music is often played on the streets as well as at the Wats.

On the eve of Songkran, housewives give their homes a thorough cleaning. Worn-out clothing or household effects and rubbish are burned - it is a spring cleaning day, supported by the religious belief that anything old and useless must be thrown away or it will bring bad luck to the owner.

During the afternoon of the 13th, Buddha images are bathed as part of the ceremony. Young people pour scented water into the hands of elders and parents as a mark of respect while seeking the blessing of the older people. In ancient days, old people were actually given a bath and clothed in new apparel presented by the young folks as a sign of respect.

Another unique Songkran custom is the releasing of caged birds and live fish, caught throughout the country and sold / purchased in the markets for this occasion. It is believed that great merit is gained through this kind act. In Paklat (Phra Pradaeng) south of Bangkok, girls in gay dresses form a procession and carry fish bowls to the rivers where the fish are released.

The custom to set free some fish goes back to the days when the central plains of Thailand were flooded during the rainy season. After the water subsided, pools were left and as the pools gradually dried up, baby fish were trapped. Farmers in those days caught small fish and kept them at home until Songkran Day when they released them into the canals, thereby gaining merit as well as preserving one of the main items of their diet.

The whole country celebrates Songkran but the festivities are nowhere as exalted as in Chiang Mai.

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If a visitor happens to be in a village, out on a country road or up in Chiang Mai, he can well expect a drenching. All people, particularly the younger ones, throw water on one another during the 3-day holiday.

In Chiang Mai, there are processions of groups of women and girls, and bands play at many places. A Queen of the Water Festival is chosen amidst much noise and gaiety. The Ping River, which runs through the city, is crowded with people wading in the water and scooping it up with pans and buckets. The visitor who wants to be in Chiang Mai for the event must plan his/her trip well in advance as hotels are usually fully booked.

Different parts of the kingdom have their own unique games, songs and dances to celebrate Songkran. Farmers in many parts of the country have ample time for the celebration as they cannot do much work in the fields until the rain comes. According to an old belief Nagas (mythical serpents) brought rain by spouting water from the seas. The more they spouted, the more rain there would be. So, the Songkran custom of throwing water can be interpreted as an attempt in rain-making.

Ploughing Ceremony

The annual Ploughing Ceremony takes place during the sixth lunar month (usually end of May) at the Phramane Ground near the Grand Palace in Bangkok. The ceremony is of great importance to the country's farmers and thousands come from the provinces to Bangkok for the event. In the old days,

the ceremony was held to give farmers the signal that it was an auspicious date to start ploughing for the new rice crop.

The ceremony can be traced back to the time of Buddha more than 2500 years ago and has been observed consistently since then.

In the Sukhothai period (1257-1350) the event was a fabulous affair, celebrated with a long procession led by the King, while the Minister of Agriculture did the ploughing. In the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767), the ceremony was a brief one which the King delegated to a representative. During the Bangkok period, since the first Chakri king, the ceremony has been fully observed without omission of any portion of the original rites although the actual ploughing has not been done by the King.

The Ploughing Ceremony is of Brahman origin and the auspicious day and hour are still set by the Royal Brahman astrologers. Some Buddhist elements have, however, been added to the rites.

The King appoints a Phaya Raek Nah (Lord of the Festival) as his representative to carry out the rites. On his arrival at the Phramane Ground, the Phaya Raek Nah is presented with three Panungs (cloth worn around the hips) of different lengths from which he chooses one. If his choice is the longest one, there will be little rain during the coming year; if it is the shortest one, rain will be plentiful while the one of medium-length denotes average rain.

A procession follows the red and gold sacred plough drawn by bulls decorated with flowers. Drummers in green costumes

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keep the beat and Brahmans chant and blow conch shells; four Nang Thepi or Consecrated Women carry gold and silver baskets filled with rice-seed.

The bulls then turn a few furrows with the sacred plough, after which the animals are presented with seven different foods and drinks: rice seed, beans, maize, hay, sesame seed, water and alcoholic liquor. It is believed that whatever the bulls choose to eat or drink will be plentiful during the next year.

The scattering of rice seed by the Phaya Raek Nah follows the ploughing. After the ceremony is ended, barriers are let down and hundreds of people rush to the rice field in an attempt to gather a few grains for good luck. Even if a farmer finds only one grain, it is taken home and mixed with his own rice to ensure a good crop in the coming year.

Loi Krathong

The night of the full moon of the twelfth lunar month (usually in mid-November) is the time of Loi Krathong. Loi means to float and Krathong is a leaf cup normally made of banana leaf. Usually the Krathong has a small coin in it, besides a candle and incense sticks.

It is unclear to what extent the festival has a religious relevance. It's not Buddhist but Buddhism doesn't prohibit the belief in a wide array of spirits and can even coexist with other religions. The fact that the Loi Krathong is not Buddhist doesn't mean that it wouldn't have a quasi religious meaning for a large number of people. A common belief is that floating the cups brings good luck.

During October and November all rivers and canals in the lowlands are flooded and in some places overflow their banks. The rainy season has ended and after the strenuous labour of ploughing and planting rice for the previous three months from dawn to dusk the heavy work is now over for the country folk. The peasants have only to wait a month to six weeks for the harvest. During this idle interval they spend the time with many feasts and festivals, among them the observance of the Loi Krathong tradition.

In the evening, when the **full moon** begins to rise, people carry their Krathongs to the banks of waterways. After the candle and incense sticks are lighted, the Krathong is pushed gently out onto the surface of the placid water. A few folk will raise their hands in worship. They watch the Krathong as it floats sluggishly along until it is out of sight.

The floating Krathong usually has a **short life**. As it floats far away from its starting place, **children** will, in most cases, swim out to **snatch** for it. They will perhaps ignore the empty ones, but are certainly eager to catch those with small coins inside.

Chinese New Year

The date of Chinese New Year is determined by the lunar calendar; usually it's in February. For the **Chinese** this is a time for family reunions, feasts and exchange of gifts. Chinese owned **businesses** are closed for 3 to 4 days. Chinese Buddhists offer prayers for good fortune at their temples. Many Chinese travel to **Nakhon Sawan** where the festivities are especially colourful.

Safety And Security

The Australian and U.S. governments are concerned that there is an increased risk of terrorism in Southeast Asia, including in Thailand. Citizens travelling to Thailand should therefore exercise caution, especially in locations where Westerners congregate, such as clubs, discos, bars, restaurants, hotels, places of worship, schools, outdoor recreation venues, tourist areas, beach resorts, and other places frequented by foreigners. They should remain vigilant with regard to their personal security and avoid crowds and demonstrations. For more information on terrorist threats, and steps that should take as a result of these threats, please see [the Worldwide Caution Public Announcement](http://travel.state.gov) at <http://travel.state.gov>.

The far south of Thailand has experienced incidents of criminally and politically motivated violence, including incidents attributed to armed local separatist/extremist groups. Although these groups focus primarily on Thai government interests, foreign citizen travellers should remain vigilant with regard to their personal security. In January 2004, a series of incidents in Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala provinces included the burning of government schools, the placement of bombs near local government offices, and armed attacks on military and police facilities. Travellers should be aware that Thai authorities may occasionally institute special security measures in affected areas, such as curfews, military patrols, or random searches of train passengers.

Tourists should also exercise caution in remote areas along the border with Burma. The Thai/Burma border is the site of on-going conflicts between the Burmese Army and armed opposition groups as well as of clashes between Thai security forces and armed drug traffickers. In addition, pirates, bandits and drug traffickers operate in these border areas.

In light of the continuing unsettled situation along Thailand border with Burma, which is subject to frequent closings to all traffic. It is recommended that all travellers exercise caution when travelling in remote or rural areas immediately adjacent to the Burma border. There remains a possibility of significant flare-ups of military activity on the Burmese side of the border that could spill over into immediately adjacent areas of northern Thailand. Visitors should travel off-road in undeveloped areas only with local guides who are familiar with the area. Border closings and re-openings occur frequently, and visitors considering travelling into Burma from Thailand should be aware that in the event of a border closure they may not be able to re-enter Thailand.

Tourists should obtain information from Thai authorities about whether official border crossing points are open, and should cross into neighbouring countries only at designated crossing points. Licensed guides can help ensure that trekkers do not cross inadvertently into a neighbouring country.

Travellers should be aware that there have been occasional incidents of violence on Thailand's northern and eastern borders with Laos. In July 2000, five people were killed and several fled from Laos to Thailand during a skirmish between apparent insurgents and government forces in Laos near the eastern border crossing at Chong Mek. Additionally, two U.S.

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citizens in 1999 and one in early 2000 were reported missing after attempting to cross illegally into Laos at the Lao-Thai border.

Although tourists have not been targeted specifically by this occasional violence, caution remains advisable. It is recommended that persons wishing to travel to border areas check with the Thai Tourist Police and your embassy or Consulate.

Strong seasonal undercurrents at popular beach resorts pose a sometimes fatal threat to surfers and swimmers. During the monsoon season from May through October, drowning is the leading cause of death for tourists visiting the resort island of Phuket. Some, but not all, beaches have warning flags to indicate the degree of risk (red flag: sea condition dangerous for swimming; yellow flag: sea condition rough, swim with caution; green flag: sea condition stable). In July 2001, an American tourist died in a surfing accident in Phuket at a beach that was not marked, and in January 2004, an American drowned after underestimating the strength of the current off of Koh Samui.

Crime Information

Although the crime threat in Bangkok remains lower than that in many Western cities, crimes of opportunity such as pick pocketing, purse-snatching, and burglary have become more common in recent years. Travellers should be especially wary when walking in crowded markets, tourist sites and bus or train stations. Many foreign citizens have reported having passports, wallets, and other valuables stolen in Bangkok's Chatuchak Weekend Market, usually by thieves who cut into

purses or bags with a razor and remove items surreptitiously. Police at the Market usually refuse to issue police reports for foreign victims of theft, requiring them instead to travel several miles to the central Tourist Police office. Violent crimes against foreigners are relatively rare.

Reports of serious crimes involving taxis or "tuk-tuks" (three-wheeled taxis) are also relatively rare, although attempts to charge excessive fares occur regularly. In 2003, there were several taxi-related incidents in Bangkok involving foreign passengers. In one, a taxi driver stabbed two English teachers, an American and a Canadian, after an argument; in another, a taxi driver stole over \$9,000 from an American passenger after the American dozed off; and in yet another, a taxi driver shot a Japanese flight attendant riding in his cab. Visitors should not hesitate to ask to be let out of a taxi immediately if the driver is acting suspiciously or driving erratically.

When arriving at Bangkok's airport, travellers should use only taxis from the airport's official taxi stand, cars from the airport limousine counters, or airport buses. All major hotels in Bangkok can also arrange to have a car and driver meet incoming flights. It is not common for Thai taxis to pick up additional passengers. Travellers should be wary of drivers seeking to do so, and should never enter a cab that has someone besides the driver in it..

Visitors frequently encounter taxi drivers and others who tout gem stores or entertainment venues. These touts receive kickbacks or commissions which drive up the prices of the goods or services, and travellers should not accept tours or other offers from them. Scams involving gems, city tours,

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entertainment venues and credit cards are common, especially in areas heavily visited by tourists. Credit cards should only be used in reputable, established businesses, and the amount charged should be checked for accuracy.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) receives over 1,000 complaints each year from visitors who have been cheated on gem purchases. Gem scams usually follow a predictable pattern. Someone will approach a tourist outside of a well-known tourist attraction such as the Grand Palace or the Jim Thompson House, and will say that the attraction is closed. The friendly stranger will quickly gain the tourist's confidence, and will suggest a visit to a temple which is supposedly open only one day per year; the stranger will then mention in passing that a special once-a-year government-sponsored gem sale is going on, and will direct the tourist to a waiting tuk-tuk. At the temple, another stranger – sometimes a foreigner – will engage the tourist in conversation and will, by seeming coincidence, also mention the "special" gem sale. The tourist agrees to go look at the gem shop, and is soon convinced to buy thousands of dollars worth of jewels which can supposedly be sold in the U.S. for a 100% profit. When the tourist actually has the goods appraised, they turn out to be of minimal value, and the shop's money-back guarantee is not honoured. No matter what a tout may say, no jewellery stores are owned, operated, or sponsored by the Thai Government or by the Thai royal family. [Lists of gem dealers who have promised to abide by TAT guidelines are available online](http://www.tat.or.th/do/gems.htm) at <http://www.tat.or.th/do/gems.htm>, while detailed information on gem scams can be found on numerous Internet websites. A traveller who has fallen victim to a gem scam should contact the local branch of the Tourist Police, or call their country-wide toll-free number: 1155.

Although most bars and entertainment venues operate honestly, some, especially in tourist areas such as Patpong, may at times try to charge exorbitant amounts for drinks or unadvertised cover charges, and to threaten violence if the charges aren't paid. If victimised in this fashion, travellers should not attempt to resolve the problem themselves, but should instead pay the price demanded and then seek out a nearby Tourist Police officer for help in getting restitution. (If no officer is nearby, the Tourist Police may be contacted toll-free by dialling 1155.)

There have been occasional reports of scopolamine druggings perpetrated by prostitutes or unscrupulous bar workers for the purpose of robbery. Tourists have also been victimised by drugged food and drink, usually offered by a friendly stranger, sometimes posing as fellow traveller on an overnight bus or train. In addition, casual acquaintances met in a bar or on the street may pose a threat. Travellers are advised to avoid leaving drinks or food unattended, and should avoid going to unfamiliar venues alone. Some trekking tour companies, particularly in Northern Thailand, have been known to make drugs available to trekkers. In July 2001, an American died after smoking opium in a northern hill tribe village. Travellers should not accept drugs of any kind, as the drugs may be altered or harmful, and the use or sale of narcotic drugs is illegal.

The loss or theft abroad of a passport should be reported immediately to the local police and the nearest Embassy or Consulate. If you are the victim of a crime while overseas, in addition to reporting to local police, please contact the nearest Embassy or Consulate for assistance. The

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Embassy/Consulate staff can, for example, assist you to find appropriate medical care, to contact family members or friends and explain how funds could be transferred. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and to find an attorney if needed.

Medical Facilities

Medical treatment is generally adequate throughout Thailand, and is quite good in Bangkok, where excellent facilities exist for routine, long-term and emergency health care. Thailand has been experiencing an epidemic of HIV infection and AIDS. Heterosexual transmission accounts for most HIV infections, and HIV is common among prostitutes of both sexes, as well as among injection drug users. HIV infections among men who have sex with men appear to be on the rise. Additionally, alcoholic beverages, medications and drugs may be more potent or of a different composition. Several tourists die in Thailand each year of apparent premature heart attacks after drinking alcohol or using drugs.

Medical Insurance

It is strongly urged that travellers consult with their medical insurance company prior to travelling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation

When making a decision regarding health insurance, travellers should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a

medical evacuation may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travellers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or if you will be reimbursed later for expenses you incur. Some insurance policies also include coverage for psychiatric treatment and for disposition of remains in the event of death.

Other Health Information

[Information on vaccinations and other health precautions, such as safe food and water precautions and insect bite protection](#), may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's hotline for international travellers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); fax 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299), or via CDC's Internet site at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

For [information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad](#), consult the World Health Organization's website at <http://www.who.int/en>. [Further health information for travellers](#) is available at <http://www.who.int/iht>.

Traffic Safety And Road Conditions

While in a foreign country, travellers may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in their home country. The information below concerning Thailand is provided for general reference only, and may not be totally accurate in a particular location or circumstance:

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Safety of Public Transportation: Fair
Urban Road Conditions/Maintenance: Good
Rural Road Conditions/Maintenance: Good
Availability of Roadside Assistance: Poor

Traffic moves on the left in Thailand, although motorcycles and motorised carts often drive (illegally) against the traffic flow. The city of Bangkok has heavy traffic composed of motorcycles, cars, trucks, buses, and three-wheeled tuk-tuks.

For safety, pedestrians should use overhead walkways whenever possible and should look carefully in both directions before crossing streets, even when using a marked crosswalk with a green "walk" light illuminated.

Traffic accidents are common in Thailand, and those involving motorcycles can be particularly deadly. The U.S. Embassy has sent a notice to Embassy staff and family members strongly recommending that they refrain from using motorcycles (especially motorcycle taxis), mopeds, and tuk-tuks in Bangkok, and the Embassy advises visitors and residents to follow this recommendation as well. In 2003, eight Americans were killed in traffic accidents in Thailand, seven of whom were riding motorcycles. Use of motorcycle helmets is mandatory, but this law is seldom enforced. The accident rate in Thailand is particularly high during long holidays, when alcohol use and traffic are both heavier than normal. During the Songkran (Thai New Year) holiday in April, the problem is further exacerbated by people throwing water at passing vehicles as part of the traditional celebration. Over the week-long New Year holiday in December 2003 – January 2004, accidents caused over 850 deaths and more than 42,000

injuries on Thai roads; over 75% of the accidents involved motorcycles.

Paved roads, many of them four lanes wide, connect Thailand's major cities. On the country's numerous two lane roads, however, slow-moving trucks limit speed and visibility.

Speeding, reckless passing, and failure to obey traffic laws is common in all regions of Thailand, as is the consumption of alcohol, amphetamines and other stimulants by commercial drivers. Serious bus crashes occur frequently, especially on overnight trips, and sometimes result in fatalities. Congested roads and a scarcity of ambulances can make it difficult for accident victims to receive timely medical attention. Thailand requires that all vehicles be covered by third-party liability insurance for death or injury, but there is no mandatory coverage for property damage. The Embassy strongly encourages its employees to obtain liability insurance coverage over and above the minimum third party liability insurance required by the Thai Government. Visiting motorists should consider this as well, as the more affluent driver, even if not at fault, is frequently compelled to cover the expenses of the other party in an accident in Thailand.

Travellers in Bangkok may wish to travel about the city using the BTS "Skytrain" elevated mass transit system, which operates daily from 6 a.m. to midnight. Bangkok also has an extensive bus system, but buses can be overcrowded, and are often driven with little or no regard for passenger safety. Cities elsewhere in Thailand typically have only rudimentary public transportation, and usually do not have metered taxis.

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In many cases, motorcycle taxis, tuk-tuks, bicycle-powered rickshaws, and pick-up trucks will be the only options available for travellers without their own transport. Visitors should be cautious when using these services, as all can be dangerous in fast or heavy traffic.

Customs Regulations

Thai customs authorities may enforce strict regulations concerning temporary importation into or export from Thailand of items such as firearms, explosives, narcotics and drugs, radio equipment, books or other printed material and video or audio recordings which might be considered subversive to national security, obscene, or in any way harmful to the public interest and cultural property. It is advisable to contact the Embassy of Thailand for specific information regarding customs requirements.

Thai customs authorities encourage the use of an ATA (Admission Temporaire/Temporary Admission) Carnet for the temporary admission of professional equipment, commercial samples, and/or goods for exhibitions and fair purposes.

Criminal Penalties

While in a foreign country, a foreign citizen is subject to that country's laws and regulations, which sometimes differ significantly from those in their home country and may not afford the protections the individual is accustomed to under their own laws. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the home country for similar offences. Persons violating Thai laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested or imprisoned.

In this connection, it is a criminal offence to make negative comments about the King or other members of the royal family. Thais hold the King in the highest regard, and it is a serious crime to make critical or defamatory comments about him. This particular crime, called "lese majeste", is punishable by a prison sentence of three to fifteen years. Purposely tearing or destroying Thai bank notes, which carry an image of the King, may be considered such an offence, as can spitting on or otherwise defiling an official uniform bearing royal insignia.

The Thai Government has publicly stated that it will not tolerate the use of Thai territory as a base by groups trying to overthrow or destabilise the governments of nearby countries. Numerous foreign citizens have been arrested or detained under suspicion of carrying out such activities; sometimes these detentions are carried out by military authorities, and your Embassy may not learn of them until many days after the fact. Many other westerners suspected of advocating the armed overthrow of other governments have been "blacklisted" from entering the country.

Penalties for the possession, use, or trafficking of illegal drugs in Thailand are severe. Convicted offenders can expect long prison sentences under harsh conditions, and often heavy fines as well. Thailand also has a death penalty for serious drug offences, and has executed convicted traffickers. Foreign embassies frequently do not learn of the arrest of their citizens for minor drug offences, particularly in southern Thailand, until several days after the incident.

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Thai police occasionally raid discos, bars, or night-clubs looking for underage patrons and drug users. During the raids, they typically check the IDs of all customers in the establishment, and then make each person provide a urine sample to be checked for narcotics. Foreigners are not excused from these checks, and anyone whose urine tests positive for drugs is arrested and charged.

Baht (B)	Basic currency unit, divided into 100 satang. In 1984 the value of the baht was tied to a basket of foreign currencies, including the United States dollar, that were significant to the Thai economy. The exchange rate per US\$1 was B25.74 in September 1987.
Chaophraya	Traditional title given to the highest ranking official in the civil government.
Fiscal year (FY)	October 1 to September 30.
Khmer rouge	The name given to Khmer communists by Prince Sihanouk in the 1960s. Later (although a misnomer) it was applied to the Cambodian insurgents of varying ideological backgrounds who opposed the Khmer Republic of Lon Nol. Between 1975 and 1978 it also became an informal designation for the regime of Democratic Kampuchea, whose leaders were the radical Pol Pot faction of the Kampuchean (or Khmer) Communist Party. After the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December 1978, the Khmer Rouge became one of the three

	components of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea that contested the Vietnamese presence and the Hanoi-installed regime of the People's Republic of Kampuchea.
Khwan	Body-spirit or life-soul, generally thought to reside in the head; illness and death follow loss of the <i>khwan</i> .
Luang	Title of distinction designating that its bearer is in royal service.
Nai	Literally, master. Lowest rank in the traditional nobility, the term is also used as a mark of respect for employers or any person of superior status. Under the <i>sakdi na (q.v.)</i> system, it identified its bearer as a landholder to whom labor service was due. Variant form is <i>naaj</i> .
Phi	General term for a variety of spirits believed to have power over human beings. Specific kinds of spirits may have particular names.
Phra	Traditional princely title prefix designating that its bearer is a relative of the king; functional title given to holders of ranks in the civil administration below that of <i>phraya (q.v.)</i> ; honorific for monks or persons and objects having religious associations.
Phrai	Generic term for commoners, variously translated as servant, serf, or, incorrectly, as slave. The <i>phrai</i> was bound to the land in the service of a <i>nai (q.v.)</i> under the <i>sakdi na (q.v.)</i> system.

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Phraya	Traditional princely title conferred on holder of second highest rank in the civil government and on viceroys of tributary states. Sometimes seen as <i>phrajaa</i> or <i>phya</i> .
Sakdi na	Literally, <i>sak</i> (power in the sense of resources); <i>na</i> (paddy land). A system of social ranking originally based on the king's allocation of specific quantities of rice land to persons according to their rank, each such rank being defined in terms of so-called quality points (or dignity marks). The size of the allotment was closely associated with the number of persons owing labor service to an individual of a given rank; by the beginning of the Chakkri Dynasty in 1782, an individual's rank in the system was thought of primarily in relation to the number of persons owing him service, regardless of the amount of land he controlled. shifting cultivation--A traditional method of agriculture characterised by the rotation of fields rather than crops, the use of short cropping periods and long fallow periods, and the maintenance of fertility by allowing natural vegetation to regenerate on fallow land. Clearing of new or previously cropped land is often accomplished by cutting and burning vegetation. Also known as slash-and-burn or swidden agriculture. Thai term is

	<i>tam rai</i> .
Shifting cultivation	A traditional method of agriculture characterised by the rotation of fields rather than crops, the use of short cropping periods and long fallow periods, and the maintenance of fertility by allowing natural vegetation to regenerate on fallow land. Clearing of new or previously cropped land is often accomplished by cutting and burning vegetation. Also known as slash-and-burn or swidden agriculture. Thai term is <i>tam rai</i> .
Siam	Official name of the Thai kingdom from 1855 to 1939 and again from 1946 to 1949. Used conventionally in European sources from the late sixteenth century for the kingdom of Ayutthaya and later the kingdom of Bangkok, hence the term Siamese (<i>q.v.</i>) to describe their inhabitants.
Siamese	Inhabitants of Siam (<i>q.v.</i>). Historically used by Mon and Khmer to distinguish Tai (<i>q.v.</i>)-speaking settlers in the Chao Phraya Valley from those in other regions. The term was extended in conventional usage to inhabitants of Siam. Between 1939 and 1946 and since 1949, Thai (<i>q.v.</i>) and not Siamese has been employed to describe the dominant ethnic group of Thailand and Central Thai to denote the Thai of the Chao Phraya Valley.

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Sino-thai	Term used by observers of Thailand for persons of Chinese and Thai ancestry. It does not apply to a clearly delineated, cohesive group; some such persons have been essentially assimilated into Thai society; others (usually with a recent Chinese forebear) have not.
Tai	A family of languages spoken in Southeast Asia and southern China including Thai (<i>q.v.</i>); by extension the peoples speaking languages of that family.
Thai	A national of Thailand; one or more persons of the (region- ally varied) ethnic group dominant in Thailand; the (dialectically varied) language of the Thai people, one of several grouped in Tai (<i>q.v.</i>) family of languages; also used adjectivally.

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