

ASIA · BEACHES · ISLANDS · FOOD · CULTURE · DIVING · NIGHTLIFE

 Thailand

Bangkok's gilded temples and night markets never really slow down, and Krabi's limestone cliffs rise straight out of turquoise water. Beyond them lie the ruined capitals of Ayutthaya and Sukhothai, Chiang Mai's mountain temples and some of the world's best street food. The north and the islands suit very different trip lengths and budgets, so plan accordingly.

 **The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all but essential travel to parts of Thailand.**
Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 12 October 2026.

 CAPITAL Bangkok	 CURRENCY Thai baht (THB) £1 ≈ THB 44.94	 LANGUAGE Thai	 BEST TIME Nov–Feb
 DAILY BUDGET £30–£170 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type A, B, C, F, O 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 12h direct ~£550–£1,100 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+7 standard time

Thailand's classic first trip is a loop: a few days in Bangkok, a day trip to Ayutthaya, then north by overnight train or short flight to Chiang Mai, with side trips to Chiang Rai, Pai or Sukhothai, before flying south for beaches. The south splits in two: the Andaman coast — Phuket, Krabi, Ko Lanta and Ko Phi Phi — and the Gulf of Thailand islands of Ko Samui, Ko Pha-ngan and Ko Tao, which have a different rainy season. Inland, Khao Sok's rainforest makes a good bridge between the coasts, while the north-east, Isan, rewards return visitors with Khmer temples and few tourists.

Thailand is easy: transport is cheap and reliable, accommodation ranges from £10 hostels to superb resorts, and English is widely used in tourist areas. That ease brings crowds — Phi Phi, Phuket and Chiang Mai's old city can feel saturated in peak season — but quieter islands and towns are rarely far away. Food is a highlight at every budget, from market stalls to Bangkok's fine-dining scene. It suits first-time Asia travellers, families, divers and food lovers. Surprises include the April heat, smoky haze in the north during the February–April burning season, and how seriously Thais take respect for the monarchy and Buddhism.

Top 5 highlights

1

ARCHITECTURE

Grand Palace and Wat Pho, Bangkok

The former royal residence houses the revered Emerald Buddha in Wat Phra Kaew; next door, Wat Pho shelters a 46-metre gilded reclining Buddha and a renowned massage school. Cover shoulders and knees.

2

HISTORY

Ayutthaya Historical Park

Capital of Siam for four centuries until Burmese armies sacked it in 1767, Ayutthaya's brick prangs and headless Buddhas spread across a river island north of Bangkok. Cycle between the ruins and stay for sunset.

3

SACRED SITE

Wat Phra That Doi Suthep

Climb some 300 steps up a naga-flanked staircase, or take the funicular, to this golden-spired temple on the mountain above Chiang Mai, one of northern Thailand's holiest sites, with views over the city.

4

NATURE

Khao Sok National Park

Ancient rainforest, limestone karsts and the vast Cheow Lan reservoir make this the south's best inland escape. Sleep in floating raft houses on the lake and look for gibbons, hornbills and, in season, the giant Rafflesia flower.

5

BEACH

Railay, Krabi

Cut off from Krabi's roads by sheer limestone cliffs, this peninsula is reached by longtail boat. Rock climbing, the cave shrine at Phra Nang Beach and kayaking among karst islands fill the days.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Bangkok

≈ 11 million people

Glittering temples, canal boats, rooftop bars and legendary street food make the capital far more than a transit stop; stay near the river or a Skytrain line.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Chiang Mai

≈ 1.2 million people

The north's cultural capital has a moated old city dotted with temples, a Sunday walking-street market, cookery schools and easy access to the hills and Doi Suthep.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Nakhon Ratchasima

≈ 470,000 people

Known as Korat, this gateway to Isan is a workaday city, but it makes a base for Khao Yai National Park and the Khmer temple at Phimai.

Figures are urban-area estimates: Bangkok's metropolitan region is far larger than the city proper, and Chiang Mai's total includes the built-up districts around the old city.

Holiday regions in Thailand

These areas have their own season and weather — see their guides for sea temperatures, resorts and flights.

**Phuket, Krabi & the Andaman coast**

Thailand Best: Nov–Apr 12h from London

Sea up to 30°C ~£105/day

**Koh Samui & the Gulf islands**

Thailand Best: Feb–Aug 16h 30m from London

Sea up to 30°C ~£115/day

When to go to Thailand

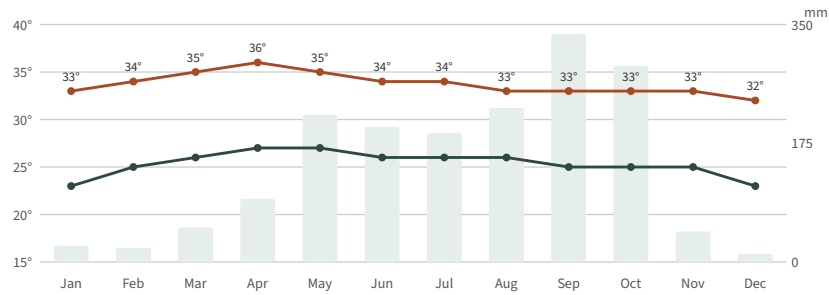
Best time: **Nov–Feb**.



Best Good Mixed Poor

Average climate in Bangkok

High °C Low °C Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Apr	Songkran Thai New Year, 13–15 April, turns streets into a nationwide water fight, especially in Chiang Mai and on Bangkok's Silom Road, alongside quieter temple merit-making and Buddha-bathing rituals.
Sep–Oct	Phuket Vegetarian Festival For nine days in the ninth lunar month, Phuket's Chinese community abstains from meat, and devotees in trance pierce their cheeks in dramatic street processions.
Nov	Loy Krathong and Yi Peng On the full moon of the twelfth lunar month, usually November, people float candlelit krathong on rivers; in Chiang Mai, Yi Peng adds thousands of paper lanterns released into the sky.

How much does Thailand cost?

SHOESTRING £30 per person / day ≈ THB 1,348 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £75 per person / day ≈ THB 3,370 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £170 per person / day ≈ THB 7,639 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Pad thai

Stir-fried rice noodles with egg, tofu or prawns, tamarind, palm sugar and fish sauce, finished with peanuts, beansprouts and lime; best from a street wok.

Tom yum goong

Hot-and-sour prawn soup sharp with lemongrass, galangal, makrut lime leaves and chilli; the creamier 'nam khon' version adds milk.

Som tam

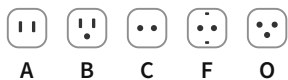
Shredded green papaya pounded in a mortar with chilli, lime, fish sauce and palm sugar; Isan versions add pungent fermented fish.

Getting around

Budget airlines such as Thai AirAsia, Nok Air and Thai Lion Air make long hops cheap, while overnight sleeper trains to Chiang Mai leave from Bangkok's Krung Thep Aphiwat station. Government and VIP buses reach almost everywhere, and ferries and speedboats serve the islands. In Bangkok, the BTS Skytrain, MRT and river boats beat the traffic; Grab and Bolt work in most cities.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



220V — bring a UK-to-A/B/C/F/O adapter

DIALLING CODE

+66

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

TIPPING

Not traditionally expected, but leaving loose change or 20–50 baht in restaurants, rounding up taxi fares and tipping masseurs and guides is now common.

ETIQUETTE

Never criticise the royal family, stand for the royal anthem, don't touch anyone's head or point your feet at people or Buddha images, and remove shoes before entering temples and homes.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK), Bangkok; Don Mueang International Airport (DMK), Bangkok; Phuket International Airport (HKT), Phuket

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Telephone: **191** (ambulance, fire, police)

Ambulance: **1669**

Fire: **199**

Police: **191**

Tourist police: **1155**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

TIME ZONE

UTC+7 (standard time)

DRIVING

On the left

Visas & entry for Thailand

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

From 15 September 2026, if you enter Thailand under the visa exemption scheme, you can stay for up to 30 days for tourism only. Visa-exempt entry does not cover business travel, including attending conferences, meetings or other business activities. If you are travelling for business purposes, you should obtain the appropriate visa before you travel.

Visa-exempt entry for tourism through land-border immigration checkpoints is normally limited to 2 entries per calendar year. This restriction does not generally apply to arrivals by air. If you frequently enter Thailand as a tourist, immigration officials may ask for evidence of your onward travel, accommodation, or sufficient funds, and may refuse entry if they believe you are not a genuine visitor.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

- Hepatitis A
- Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

- Chikungunya
- Dengue
- Hepatitis B
- Japanese encephalitis
- Measles
- Rabies
- Tuberculosis
- Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

Low risk of malaria

- There is a low risk of malaria in the rural, forested borders of Thailand with Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.
- There is a very low risk of malaria in the remaining areas of Thailand including Kanchanaburi (Kwai Bridge): awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.
- There is no risk of malaria in the cities of Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Koh Phangan, Koh Samui, and Pattaya: bite avoidance recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Thailand

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 23 Oct 2026	HM King Chulalongkorn Memorial Day
Sat 5 Dec 2026	HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great's Birthday · National Day · National Father's Day
Mon 7 Dec 2026	HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great's Birthday (in lieu) · National Day (in lieu) · National Father's Day (in lieu)
Thu 10 Dec 2026	Constitution Day
Thu 31 Dec 2026	New Year's Eve
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Sat 9 Jan 2027	National Children's Day
Sun 21 Feb 2027	Makha Bucha
Mon 22 Feb 2027	Makha Bucha (in lieu)
Tue 6 Apr 2027	Chakri Memorial Day
Tue 13 Apr 2027	Songkran Festival
Wed 14 Apr 2027	Songkran Festival
Thu 15 Apr 2027	Songkran Festival
Sat 1 May 2027	National Labour Day
Mon 3 May 2027	National Labour Day (in lieu)
Tue 4 May 2027	Coronation Day
Thu 20 May 2027	Visakha Bucha
Thu 3 Jun 2027	HM Queen Suthida's Birthday
Sun 18 Jul 2027	Asarnha Bucha

Mon 19 Jul 2027	Buddhist Lent Day
Tue 20 Jul 2027	Asarnha Bucha (in lieu)
Wed 28 Jul 2027	HM King Maha Vajiralongkorn's Birthday
Thu 12 Aug 2027	HM Queen Sirikit The Queen Mother's Birthday · National Mother's Day
Wed 13 Oct 2027	HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej Memorial Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Thai

ENGLISH	THAI	SAY IT
Hello	สวัสดี	sah-wah-DEE (krap/kah)
Thank you	ขอบคุณ	kop-KOON (krap/kah)
Please	กรุณา	gah-roo-NAH
Excuse me	ขอโทษ	kor-TOHT
How much is this?	อันนี้เท่าไหร่	an-NEE tao-RAI

Know before you go

- If a friendly stranger says the Grand Palace is closed and offers a cheap tuk-tuk tour instead, decline: it usually ends at a gem or tailor shop.
- Riding a scooter without a valid motorcycle licence and helmet is illegal and usually voids travel insurance; check your UK licence covers motorbikes before hiring one.
- The Andaman coast is wettest from May to October, while Ko Samui and the Gulf islands get most rain from October to December — pick your coast by month.