

TRANSPORT

Bangkok may seem chaotic and impenetrable at first but, regular traffic jams notwithstanding, its transport system works reasonably well and is not nearly as dire as legend would have it. And as urban railways continue to be built, it should keep getting better. Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

AIR

Bangkok is a major Southeast Asian air hub, and dozens of airlines fly regularly between the Thai capital and Europe, Asia, the USA and Australia. Thailand's national carrier is **Thai Airways International** (THAI; www.thaiair.com), which also operates a number of domestic air routes.

Airlines

DOMESTIC

Thailand has several airlines – both full service and low cost – competing on a large network of domestic routes. All of those listed here also fly regional international routes. Nok Air, Orient Thai, PB Air and Thai Air Asia are budget airlines, Thai Airways is full service and Bangkok Airways is somewhere in between. Big discounts are often available online, and most deal only in e-tickets, so there's no reason to schlep out to their distant offices to book a fare; use a travel agent, the internet or the phone. For last-minute fares, buy at the departures level in the relevant airport.

Bangkok Airways (PG; ☎ 1771 or 0 2265 5555; www.bangkokair.com)

Nok Air (OX; ☎ 1318; www.nokair.com)

PB Air (9Q; ☎ 0 2261 0222; www.pbair.com)

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works, and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

Thai Air Asia (AK; ☎ 0 2515 9999; www.airasia.com)

Thai Airways International (TG; ☎ 0 2232 8000; www.thaiair.com)

INTERNATIONAL

Some of the airlines flying to Thailand, with offices where they exist.

Air Asia (AK; ☎ 0 2515 9999; www.airasia.com)

Air Canada (AC; Map pp108–9; ☎ 0 2670 0400; www.aircanada.ca; Suite 1708, Empire Tower, River Wing West, Th Sathon Tai, Yannawa, Sathon)

Air France (AF; Map pp108–9; ☎ 0 2635 1191; www.airfrance.com; 20th fl, Vorawat Bldg, 849 Th Silom)

Air India (AI; Map pp118–19; ☎ 0 2653 2288; www.airindia.com; 18th fl, One Pacific Pl, 140 Th Sukhumvit)

Air New Zealand (NZ; Map pp108–9; ☎ 0 2235 8280; www.airnewzealand.com; ITF Tower, 11/4 Th Silom)

Cathay Pacific Airways (CX; Map pp98–9; ☎ 0 2263 0606; www.cathaypacific.com; 11th fl, Ploenchit Tower, 898 Th Ploenchit)

China Airlines (CI; Map pp98–9; ☎ 0 2250 9898; www.china-airlines.com; 4th fl, Peninsula Plaza, 153 Th Ratchadamri)

Garuda Indonesia (GA; Map p112; ☎ 0 2679 7371-2; www.garuda-indonesia.com; 27th fl, Lumpkini Tower, 1168/77 Th Phra Ram IV)

Japan Airlines (JL; ☎ 0 2649 9500; www.jal.com/jp/en/; 12th fl, Nantawan Bldg, 161 Th Ratchadamri, Lumpkini)

Jetstar (☎ 0 2267 5125; www.jetstar.com)

KLM Royal Dutch Airlines (KL; Map pp108–9; ☎ 0 2635 2400; www.klm.com; 20th fl, Vorawat Bldg, 849 Th Silom)

Lao Airlines (QV; Map pp118–19; ☎ 0 2664 0661; 10th fl, 253 Tower, 253 Soi Asoke, Th Sukhumvit)

Lufthansa Airlines (LH; Map pp118–19; ☎ 0 2264 2400; www.lufthansa.com; 18th fl, Q House Asoke Bldg, 66 Soi 21, Th Sukhumvit)

Malaysia Airlines (MH; Map pp98–9; ☎ 0 2263 0565; www.malaysiaairlines.com; 20th fl, Ploenchit Tower, 898 Th Ploenchit)

Qantas Airways (QF; ☎ 0 2627 1701; www.qantas.com.au)

Singapore Airlines (SQ; Map p112; ☎ 0 2353 6000; www.singaporeair.com; 12th fl, Silom Center Bldg, 2 Th Silom)

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motorised travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change), but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author air travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

Swiss (LX; ☎ 0 2204 7744; www.swiss.com; 18th fl, Q House Asoke Bldg, 66 Soi 21, Th Sukhumvit)

United Airlines (UA; Map pp98–9; ☎ 0 2253 0558; www.unitedairlines.co.th; 14th fl, Sindhorn Bldg, 130-132 Th Withayu)

Airports

Bangkok has two main airports. Opened in late 2006, **Suvarnabhumi International Airport** (☎ 0 2132 1888; www2.airportthai.co.th) is the vast glass-and-concrete construction 30km east of central Bangkok that acts as the main international airport. After rather a lot of teething problems, at most times Suvarnabhumi

(pronounced su-wan-a-poom) works fairly efficiently. The unofficial www.bangkokairportonline.com site has up-to-date transport information and real-time details of airport arrivals and departures. **Left-luggage facilities** (☎ 24 hr) are available on Level 2, beside the helpful **TAT office** (☎ 0 2134 4077; ☎ 24 hr). For airport hotels, see p220.

Don Muang Airport (Map pp124–5; ☎ 0 2535 1111; www2.airportthai.co.th) is 25km north of the city centre and, after being temporarily retired, it now serves some, but not all, domestic routes.

Getting to/from Don Muang you can take a taxi or bus. Taking a taxi is the fastest and most comfortable option, and fares at most times will be a very reasonable 200B to 350B depending on the traffic and how far you're going. Taxis depart from outside the arrivals hall, and there is a 50B airport charge added to the meter fare, plus expressway tolls.

Slow, crowded public bus 59 stops on the highway in front of the airport and carries on to Banglamphu, passing Th Khao San and the Democracy Monument; luggage is not allowed. Air-con buses are faster, and you might actually get a seat. Useful air-con routes include:

Bus 29 Northern Bus Terminal, Victory Monument, Siam Sq and Hualamphong train station

Bus 510 Victory Monument, Southern Bus Terminal

Bus 513 Th Sukhumvit, Eastern Bus Terminal

THE HAND LUGGAGE NAZIS OF SUVARNABHUMI

Be warned! Flying from Suvarnabhumi International Airport can be an experience in loss if you carry any liquids in your hand luggage. Bottles bought inside the airport and sealed in a duty free bag will be okay, but everything else will be confiscated. That means your sun cream, moisturiser, toothpaste – look for the huge bags full of stuff being picked over by security staff near the X-ray checks. Some airlines even take 3ml vials of insulin for 'safekeeping', offering to deliver them to your seat when required during the flight. Anything liquid you don't want to lose, check it in or leave it at home.

GETTING INTO TOWN FROM SUVARNABHUMI

Airport Bus

Airport Express runs four useful routes between Suvarnabhumi and Bangkok city. They operate from 5am to midnight for a flat 150B fare, meaning a taxi will be a comparable price if there are two people heading to central Bangkok, but more expensive if you're going to Banglamphu. The Airport Express counter is near entrance 8 on level 1. Routes stop at Skytrain stations, major hotels and other landmarks.

AE-1 to Silom (by expressway). Via Pratunam, Central World, Ratchadamri Skytrain, Lumpini Park, Th SalaDaeng, Patpong, Plaza Hotel and others.

AE-2 to Banglamphu (by expressway). Via Th Phetchaburi Soi 30, Democracy Monument, Royal Hotel, Th Phra Athit, Th Phra Sumen, Th Khao San.

AE-3 to Sukhumvit Soi 52, Eastern Bus Terminal, Soi 34, 24, 20, 18, 10, 6, Central Chidlom, Central World, Soi Nana.

AE-4 to Hualamphong train station Via Victory Monument, Phayathai Skytrain, Siam Sq, MBK, Chulalongkorn University.

Local Transport

With more time and less money, you could take the Skytrain to On Nut (40B), then from near the market entrance opposite Tesco take the either bus 552 (every 20 minutes or so, 35B) or the BTS minivan (departs when full, 25B) to the airport.

Several other air-con local buses serve Suvarnabhumi for a 35B flat fare. Departures are every 20 minutes or so. Most useful are:

Bus 551 Siam Paragon Via Victory Monument

Bus 552 Klong Toei Via Sukumvit 101 and On Nut Skytrain

Buses 554 & 555 Don Muang Airport

Bus 556 Southern Bus Terminal, via Democracy Monument (for Th Khao San) and Thammasat University.

Intercity buses to places including Pattaya, Rayong and Trat stop at the Public Transportation Centre, reached via a free shuttle from the airport.

Minivan

If you are heading to the airport from Banglamphu, the hotels and guesthouses can book you on air-con minivans. These pick up from hotels and guesthouses and cost about 180B per person (you're better off using the AE bus).

Skytrain

From early 2009 (insha'Allah) a new Skytrain line will run from downstairs at the airport to a huge new City Air Terminal in central Bangkok, near Soi Asoke and Th Phetchaburi. There will be an express service (the pink line) that will take 15 minutes, and a local service (the red line) taking 27 minutes.

How useful this service will be depends on whether you're travelling alone and how far your hotel is from the City Air Terminal. Except during the worst traffic, a taxi covers the same trip in about 35 minutes for about 200B to 250B.

Taxi & Limousine

Ignore the touts and all the yellow signs pointing you to 'limousines' (actually cars costing 700B flat), walk outside on the arrivals level and join the fast-moving queue for a public taxi. Cabs booked through this desk should always use their meter, but they often try their luck so insist by saying 'meter, please'. You must also pay a 50B official airport surcharge and reimburse drivers for any toll charges (up to 60B); drivers will always ask your permission to use the tollway. Depending on traffic, a taxi to Asoke should cost 200B to 250B, Silom 300B to 350B and Banglamphu 350B to 425B. Fares are per vehicle, not per person. Break big notes before you leave the airport.

BOAT

Although many of Bangkok's *khlong* have been paved over, there is still plenty of transport along and across the Chao Phraya and up adjoining canals.

River Ferries

The **Chao Phraya Express Boat Co** (☎ 0 2623 6001; www.chaophrayaexpressboat.co.th) operates the main ferry service along the Chao Phraya. The central pier is known as Sathorn, Saphan Taksin or sometimes Central Pier, and connects to the Skytrain's Saphan Taksin station. Each pier is numbered from Sathorn, and ferries run four stops south to Wat Ratchasingkhon (S4), though tourists rarely use these. Much more useful are the services running to and from Nonthaburi (N30) in northern Bangkok; the maps in this book show the piers and their numbers. Fares are cheap and differ by distance from 10B to 34B. There are four different services, differentiated by the colour of the flags on their roofs. To avoid an unwanted trip halfway to Nonthaburi be sure to keep an eye on those flags.

Local Line (no flag) The all-stops service, operating every 15 to 20 minutes mornings and evenings.

Orange Express Stops at N1, N3, N4, N5, N6, N8, N9, N10, N12, N13, N15, N18, N21, N22, N24, N30. The most common service, departing every five to 20 minutes depending on the time of day.

Yellow Express Stops at N3, N5, N10, N12, N15, N22, N24, N30. Departing every five to 20 minutes depending on the time of day.

Blue Express Nonthaburi express, stopping N10 and N30 only. Just a couple of services in the morning 7am to 7.30am and evening at 5.35pm and 6.05pm.

A special tourist boat runs between Phra Athit and Sathorn every 30 minutes between 9.30am and 3pm. A one-day pass for unlimited travel costs 120B. There is also a boat that connects Tha Phra Athit with the Royal Barges Museum in Thonburi every hour from 10am to 3.35pm for 50B.

All this is best illustrated in the small, folding maps that detail routes, prices and times and are sometimes available at ferry piers – ask for one – or on boards at the piers.

There are also dozens of cross-river ferries, which charge 3.50B and run every few minutes until late at night.

Khlong Boats

Canal taxi boats run along Khlong Saen Saep (Banglamphu to Ramkhamhaeng) and are an easy way to get from Banglamphu to Jim Thompson's House, the Siam Sq shopping centres (get off at Th Hua Chang for both), and other points further east along Sukhumvit – after a mandatory change of boat at Tha Pratunam. These boats are mostly used by daily commuters and pull into the piers for just a few seconds – jump straight on or you'll be left behind. Fares range from 7B to 20B.

BUS

Bangkok's public buses are a cheap if not always comfortable way to get around the city. They are run by the **Bangkok Mass Transit Authority** (☎ 0 2246 4262; www.bmta.co.th), which has a website with detailed information on bus routes. Air-con fares typically start at 10B or 12B and increase depending on distance. Fares for ordinary (fan-con) buses start at 7B or 8B. Most of the bus lines run between 5am and 10pm or 11pm, except for the 'all-night' buses, which run from 3am or 4am to midmorning.

Bangkok Bus Map by Roadway, available at Asia Books (p139) and some 7-Eleven stores, is the most up-to-date route map available.

CAR

Renting a car just to drive around Bangkok is not a good idea. Parking is impossible, traffic is frustrating, road rules can be mysterious and the alternative – taxis – are cheap and ubiquitous. But if you still want to give it a go, all the big car-hire companies have offices in Bangkok and at Suvarnabhumi airport. Rates start at around 1500B per day for a small car. An International Driving Permit and passport are required for all rentals. Most can also provide drivers (600B per day, 8am to 6pm), which gives local drivers a job and means you don't have to navigate, park or deal with overzealous police.

Reliable car-rental companies include:

Avis (☎ 0 2255 5300; www.avisthailand.com; 2/12 Th Withayu), also a branch at Grand Hyatt Erawan Hotel (Map pp98–9).

Budget (Map pp124–5; ☎ 0 2203 9200; www.budget.co.th; 19/23 Bldg A, Royal City Ave, Th Phetburi Tai Mat)

Hertz (Map pp98–9; ☎ 0 2654 1105; www.hertz.com; M Thai Tower, All Seasons Pl, 87 Th Withayu)

METRO (SUBWAY)

Bangkok's first underground railway line is operated by the **Metropolitan Rapid Transit Authority** (MRTA; www.mrta.co.th) and is known locally as *rót fai tòi dìn* or 'Metro' – no-one understands 'subway'. Recently announced plans see a series of lines running more than 300km, but for now the 20km Blue Line runs from Hualamphong Railway Station north to Bang Sue and features 18 stations. Fares cost 15B to 40B; child and concession fares can be bought at ticket windows. Trains run every seven minutes from 6am to midnight, more frequently between 6am and 9am and from 4.30pm to 7.30pm.

The Metro is more useful to residents than visitors, unless you're staying in the lower Sukhumvit area. Useful stations (from north to south) include Kamphaeng Phet and Bang Sue for Chatuchak Weekend Market; Thailand Cultural Centre; Sukhumvit, where it links to Asoke Skytrain station; Khlong Toei for the market; Lumpini Park; Silom (with access to Sala Daeng Skytrain station); and Hualamphong train station and Chinatown at its southern end.

SKYTRAIN (BTS)

The **BTS Skytrain** (☎ 0 2617 7340; www.bts.co.th) allows you to soar above Bangkok's legendary traffic jams in air-conditioned comfort. Known by locals as 'BTS' or *rót fai fáa* (literally 'train sky'), services are fast, efficient and relatively cheap, although rush hour can be a squeeze. Fares range from 15B to 40B, and trains run from 6am to midnight. Ticket machines accept coins and notes (when they're working), or pick up change at the staffed kiosks. One-day (120B) passes are available, but the rechargeable cards (130B, with 100B travel and 30B card deposit) are more flexible. There are two Skytrain lines, which are well represented on free tourist maps available at most stations.

Silom Line

Starting at National Stadium on Th Phra Ram I in central Bangkok, it passes the Siam interchange station and bends around via the eastern section of Th Silom and western end of Th Sathon to finish (for now) at Saphan Taksin, on the river near the intersection of Th Charoen Krung and Th Sathon. The final stop connects to the Chao Phraya river ferries (p253). A long-awaited extension west across Saphan Taksin is due to come online in 2009.

Sukhumvit Line

Running from On Nut, at distant Soi 81 of Th Sukhumvit, this line runs west right along Th Sukhumvit, connecting to the Metro at Asoke. It continues into the shopping and commercial district and the main interchange station at Siam, where it meets the Silom BTS line. From here the line turns north up to Mo Chit, near Chatuchak Weekend Market. Five more stations are due to be built at the eastern end of the line, but don't hold your breath.

TAXI

Bangkok's thousands of brightly coloured taxis are some of the best value cabs on earth. Most are new, air-conditioned and have working seatbelts in the front seat, though less often in the back. You can flag them down almost anywhere in central Bangkok. The meter charge is 35B for the first 2km, then 4.50B for each of the next 10km, 5B for each kilometre from 13km to 20km and 5.50B per kilometre for any distance greater than 20km, plus a small standing charge in slow traffic. Freeway tolls – 25B to 70B depending on where you start – must be paid by the passenger. Because of high fuel prices, there is talk of raising taxi rates.

Taxi Radio (☎ 1681; www.taxiradio.co.th) and other 24-hour 'phone-a-cab' services are available for 20B above the metered fare.

During the morning and afternoon rush hours taxis might refuse to go to certain destinations; if this happens, just try another cab. Around Th Khao San and other tourist areas, some cabbies might refuse to use the meter and try to charge a flat fee; if this happens just walk away and find another cab.

You can hire a taxi all day for 1500B to 2000B, depending on how much driving is involved. Taxis can also be hired for trips to Pattaya (1500B), Hua Hin (2300B) and Phetchaburi (1700B), among others; see www.taxiradio.co.th for fares.

Motorcycle Taxi

Motorcycle taxis serve two purposes in Bangkok. Most commonly and popularly they form an integral part of the public transport network, running from the corner of a main thoroughfare, such as Th Sukhumvit, to the far ends of *soi* (lanes) that run off that thoroughfare. Riders wear coloured, numbered vests and gather at either end of their *soi*, usually charging about 10B for the trip (without a helmet unless you ask).

Their other purpose is as a means of beating the traffic. You tell your rider where you want to go, negotiate a price (from 20B for a short trip up to about 100B going across town), strap on the helmet (they will insist for longer trips) and say a prayer to whichever god you're into. Drivers range from responsible to kamikaze, but the average trip involves some time on the wrong side of the road and several near-death experiences. It's the sort of white-knuckle ride you'd pay good money for at Disneyland, but is all in a day's work for these riders. Comfort yourself in the knowledge that there are good hospitals nearby.

TUK-TUK

Bangkok's iconic *túk-túk* (like motorised rickshaws) are used by Thais for short hops not

worth paying the taxi flag fall for. For foreigners, however, these emphysema-inducing machines are notorious for taking little 'detours' to commission-paying gem and silk shops and massage parlours. En route to 'special' temples, you'll meet 'helpful' locals who will steer you to even more rip-off opportunities. See p265 for more on *túk-túk* scams, and ignore anyone offering too-good-to-be-true 10B trips.

The other problem is that *túk-túk* drivers always ask too much from tourists (expat *faràng* never use them). Expect to be quoted a 100B fare, if not more, for even the shortest trip. Still, it's an iconic experience so it's worth bargaining them down to about 40B for a short trip, preferably at night when the pollution (hopefully) won't be quite so bad. Once you've done it, you'll find taxis are cheaper, cleaner, cooler and quieter.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most government offices are open from 8.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday, but close from noon to 1pm for lunch. In recent years the government has pushed for a 'no lunch closing' policy – you might even see signs posted to this effect – but in reality government employees pay no attention and you will almost surely be disappointed if you expect to get anything done between noon and 1pm.

Regular bank hours in Bangkok are 8.30am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday, but several banks have special foreign-exchange offices that are open longer hours (generally from 8.30am to 8pm), including weekends in touristy areas. Note that all government offices and banks are closed on public holidays (see p260).

Commercial businesses usually operate between 8.30am and 5pm Monday to Friday and sometimes Saturday morning as well. Larger shops usually open from 10am to 6.30pm or 7pm, but the big malls are open later (until 9pm or 10pm) and smaller shops may open earlier and close later. Hours for restaurants and cafés vary greatly. Some local Thai places open as early as 7am, while bigger places usually open around 11am and still others are open in the evenings only. Some close as early as 9pm and others stay open all night. Bars, by law, can't open before 4pm and must close by 1am. This, however, seems to be as typically flexible as many Thai laws.

CHILDREN

Thais love children and in many instances will shower attention on your offspring, who will find ready playmates among their Thai counterparts and a temporary nanny service at practically every stop.

For the most part, parents needn't worry too much about health concerns. Aside from the usual common sense precautions (drinking lots of water, washing hands etc), it's worth warning children specifically to keep their hands off the local *soi* (lane) dog populace; while rare in Bangkok, rabies is relatively common in Thailand.

Nappies (diapers), formula and other infant requirements are available at Bangkok supermarkets, pharmacies and convenience stores.

Check out Lonely Planet's *Travel With Children* for further advice, and see p248 for a list of kid-friendly attractions.

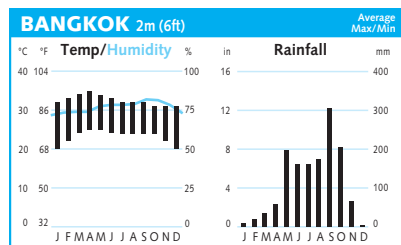
CLIMATE

At the centre of the flat, humid Mae Nam Chao Phraya delta, Bangkok sits at the same latitude as Khartoum and Guatemala City, and can be as hot as the former and as wet as the latter.

The southwest monsoon arrives between May and July and lasts into November. This is followed by a dry period from around November to May, which begins with lower relative temperatures until mid-February (because of the influence of the northeast monsoon, which bypasses this part of Thailand but results in cool breezes), followed by much higher relative temperatures from March to May. It usually rains most during August and September, though floods in early October may find you in hip-deep water in certain parts of the city. An umbrella can be invaluable – a raincoat will just make you hot.

It's worth remembering that we're talking about the weather here, a temperamental beast if ever there was one. So all the dates above are flexible. In 2008, for example, Bangkok was flooded by a major storm in normally dry January, and the cool season stretched well into March.

For recommendations on the best times to visit Bangkok see p12; for a handy interactive weather map for Bangkok and the rest of Thailand, see www.travelfish.org/country/thailand.



COURSES

You can learn a lot in Bangkok. In half a day you could learn enough to impress your friends with a firey home-cooked Thai meal; for recommended cooking courses see the boxed text, p158. Taking a course in traditional massage will undoubtedly be well received by your special friends or, if there's someone you don't like, then a week in a Muay Thai school might help. With more time you could even learn how to talk your way out of trouble.

Language

Tuition at most Thai language schools averages around 100B to 200B per hour for group classes, more for private tutoring. We recommend the following:

AAA Thai Language Center (Map pp98–9; ☎ 0 2655 5629; www.aaathai.com; 6th fl, 29 Vanissa Bldg, Th Chitlom, Pathumwan; ☎ Chitlom) Opened by a group of experienced Thai language teachers from other schools, good-value AAA Thai has a loyal following.

AUA Language Center (Map pp98–9; ☎ 0 2252 8170; www.aualanguage.com; 179 Th Ratchadamri) The most intensive language course in Bangkok, with rolling classes for listening only, from 7am to 8pm Monday to Friday; go when you like.

ThaiLing Language School (Map pp118–19; ☎ 0 2258 6846; www.thailanguageschool.com; 427 Th Sukhumvit, btwn Sois 21 & 23; ☎ Asoke; ☎ Sukhumvit) This small, personal school looks like an antique shop and has private or small-group classes concentrating on conversation.

Meditation & Massage

Most Buddhist study centres in Bangkok specialise in *vipassana* (insight) meditation. **Dharma Thai** (www.dhammathai.org) has a rundown on several prominent wat and meditation centres, or speak to the **World Fellowship of Buddhists** (WFB; Map pp118–19; ☎ 0 2661 1284; www.wfb-hq.org; 616 Benjasiri Park, Soi 24, Th Sukhumvit; ☎ 8.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri; ☎ Phrom Phong), which also hosts occasional meditation classes.

International Buddhist Meditation Center (Map p56; ☎ 0 2623 6326; www.mcu.ac.th/IBMC/; Vipassana Section Room 106, Mahachula Bldg, Wat Mahathat, Th Phra Chan) Holds regular lectures on Buddhist topics in English, and meditation classes.

Wat Mahathat (Map p56; ☎ 0 2222 6011; Section 5, Wat Mahathat, Th Maharat; Ko Ratanakosin) Separate to the IBMC, the monks here practise meditation between 4am and 2pm most days, though call ahead to make sure

the English-speaking instructors are in town. You can stay in the wat, in basic dorms, or stay outside and visit for instruction.

Wat Pho Thai Traditional Massage School (Map p56; ☎ 0 2221 3686; www.watpomassage.com; Soi Phenphat 1, Th Maharat, Ko Ratanakosin) By far the best place to learn traditional massage. Courses are held at the school headquarters across from Wat Pho on Soi Phenphat, just off Th Maharat. A 30-hour course costs 8500B.

Muay Thai

Many foreigners come to Thailand to study *muay thai* (Thai boxing). Training regimens can be *extremely* strict. See www.muaythai.com for more information.

Fairtex Muay Thai Camp (☎ 0 2755 3329; www.muaythairfairtex.com; 99/8 Soi Boonthamanusorn, Th Theparak, Samut Prakan) Training from 500B a session to 7700B-a-week residence.

Sor Vorpin (☎ 0 2282 3551; www.thaiboxings.com; 13 Trok Kasap, Th Chakkaphong) Just around the corner from Th Khao San; offers daily and weekly training schedules for foreigners. More serious training is held at a second facility outside the city. A half-day costs 500B, the weekly rate is 2500B and a month is 9000B.

CUSTOMS REGULATIONS

The white-uniformed officers of Thai customs prohibit the import or export of the usual array of goods – porn, weapons, drugs – and if you're caught with drugs, in particular, expect life never to be the same again. Otherwise, they're quite reasonable. The usual 200 cigarettes or 250g of tobacco are allowed in without duty, along with 1L of wine or spirits. Ditto for electronic goods as long as you don't look like you're planning to sell them – best to leave your third and fourth laptops at home.

For information on currency import or export, see p263. For details on exporting Buddha images and other antiques, see p129. For hours of fun reading other customs details (useful if you're planning on moving to Thailand), check out www.customs.go.th/Customs-Eng/indexEng.jsp.

DISCOUNT CARDS

The Th Khao San trade in fake student cards is still bubbling along 20 years after it began, which means unless you're prepared to dress in the black and white uniforms of Thai schools you can forget about student discounts in Bangkok.

Most of the major shopping centres around Siam Sq and Emporium offer a standard 5% off to tourists. To get it, you need a '5% off' card, which usually comes attached to the free tourist maps from the tourist booths around town. If you don't have one, don't fret. If you don't look Thai, in most cases the staff will ask if you are a tourist and, before you can nod, will have whipped out a spare card from under the counter. Once you've paid and had your discount, they'll take you to the VAT rebate office for a bit more saving.

ELECTRICITY

Electric current is 220V, 50 cycles. Electrical wall outlets are usually of the two-pin type. Some outlets accept plugs with two flat pins, and some will accept either flat or round pins. Any electrical supply shop will carry adaptors for international plugs, as well as voltage converters.

EMBASSIES

Some Bangkok embassies are listed here. For a full and regularly updated list, go to www.mfa.go.th/web/12.php and click through to Foreign Missions in Thailand. For Thai missions click through to About the Ministry.

Australia (Map p112; ☎ 02 344 6300; www.austembassy.or.th; 37 Th Sathon Tai; 🇲🇹 Lumphini)

Cambodia (Map pp124-5; ☎ 0 2957 5851; 518/4 Th Pracha Uthit, Soi Ramkamhaeng 39; Wangthonglang)

Canada (Map p112; ☎ 0 2636 0540; geo.international.gc.ca/asia/bangkok; 15th fl, Abdulrahim Bldg, 990 Th Phra Ram IV, Lumphini; 🇺🇸 Saladaeng; 🇲🇹 Silom)

China (Map pp124-5; ☎ 0 2245 0088; www.chinaembassy.or.th; 57 Th Ratchadapisek, Din Daeng; 🇲🇹 Thailand Cultural Centre)

EU (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0 2305 2600; www.deltha.ec.europa.eu; 19th fl, Kian Gwan House II, 1410/1 Th Withayu; 🇺🇸 Ploenchit)

France Embassy (Map pp108-9; ☎ 0 2266 8250-6; www.ambafrance-th.org; 35 Soi 36, Th Charoen Krung); **Consulate** (Map p112; ☎ 0 2287 1592; 29 Th Sathon Tai; 🇲🇹 Lumphini)

Germany (Map p112; ☎ 0 2287 9000; www.bangkok.diplo.de; 9 Th Sathon Tai; 🇲🇹 Lumphini)

India Embassy (pp118-19; ☎ 0 2258 0300-6; <http://indianembassy.gov.in/bangkok>; 46 Soi 23, Th Sukhumvit; 🇺🇸 Asoke); **Consulate** (pp118-19; ☎ 0 2665 2968; www.iavac-th.com; 15th fl, Glas Haus Bldg, Soi 25, Th Sukhumvit; 🇺🇸 Asoke; 🇲🇹 Sukhumvit)

Israel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 0 2204 9200; <http://bangkok.mfa.gov.il>; 25th fl, Ocean Tower II, 75 Soi 19, Th Sukhumvit; 🇺🇸 Asoke; 🇲🇹 Sukhumvit)

Indonesia (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0 2252 3135; 600-602 Th Phetburi, Ratchathewi; 🇺🇸 Ratchathewi)

Japan (p112; ☎ 0 2207 8500; www.th.emb-japan.go.jp; 177 Th Witthaya, Lumphini; 🇲🇹 Lumphini)

Laos (Map pp124-5; ☎ 0 2539 6667; www.bkklaioembassy.com; 520/1-3 Soi Sahakarnpramoon, Th Pracha Uthit, Wangthonglang)

Malaysia (p112; ☎ 0 2679 2190-9; 33-35 Th Sathon Tai; 🇲🇹 Lumphini)

Myanmar (Map pp108-9; ☎ 0 2234 0278; 132 Th Sathon Neua; 🇺🇸 Surasak)

Nepal (Map pp124-5; ☎ 0 2390 2280; 189 Soi 71, Th Sukhumvit)

Netherlands (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0 2309 5200; www.netherlandsembassy.in.th; 15 Soi Tonson, Ploenchit; 🇺🇸 Chitlom)

New Zealand (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0 2254 2530-3; www.nzembassy.com; 19th fl, M Thai Tower, All Seasons Pl, 87 Th Withayu; 🇺🇸 Ploenchit)

Singapore (Map pp108-9; ☎ 0 2286 2111; www.mfa.gov.sg; 9th & 18th fl, Rajanakam Bldg, 129 Th Sathon Tai; 🇺🇸 Chong Nonsi)

South Africa (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0 2659 2900; www.sambangkok.com; 12th fl, M-Thai Tower, All Seasons Pl; Th Witthaya; 🇺🇸 Ploenchit)

Sweden (Map pp118-19; ☎ 0 2263 7200; www.swedenabroad.com; 20th fl, One Pacific Pl, 140 Th Sukhumvit; 🇺🇸 Nana)

Switzerland (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0 2253 0156-60; www.swissembassy.or.th; 5 Th Withayu Neua, Ploenchit; 🇺🇸 Ploenchit)

UK (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0 2305 8333; www.britisembassy.gov.uk; 1031 Th Withayu, Ploenchit; 🇺🇸 Ploenchit)

USA (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0 2205 4000; <http://bangkok.usembassy.gov>; 120-122 Th Withayu, Lumphini; 🇺🇸 Ploenchit, 🇲🇹 Lumphini)

Vietnam (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0 2251 5836-8; 83/1 Th Withayu, Ploenchit; 🇺🇸 Ploenchit)

EMERGENCY

The main emergency numbers are:

Ambulance (via Police ☎ 191)

Fire (☎ 199)

Police (☎ 191)

Tourist Police (☎ 1155)

You're unlikely to find any English-speaker at the fire number, so it's best to use the default

☎ 191 number. In a medical emergency it's probably best to call the hospital direct, and it will dispatch an ambulance. See p262 for recommended hospitals.

The best way to deal with most problems requiring police, most likely a rip-off or theft, is to contact the Tourist Police on the 24-hour ☎ 1155 hotline. Unlike the regular Thai police, the tourist police are used to dealing with foreigners and can be very helpful in cases of arrest. Although they typically have no jurisdiction over the kinds of cases handled by regular cops, they should be able to help with translation, contacting your embassy and/or issuing a police report you can take to your insurer.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Thai culture is very tolerant of homosexuality, both male and female, and Bangkok is one of the most gay-friendly cities on Earth. Thailand does not have laws that discriminate against homosexuals, and Bangkok's gay scene, and increasingly the lesbian scene too, is way out in the open. Pride Week (p14) is in early November. These groups and organisations are a good place to start:

Dreaded Ned (www.dreadedned.com) Listings, forums, personal ads.

Gay Guide in Thailand (www.gayguidein thailand.com) What it says on the (six)-pack.

Lesbian Guide to Bangkok (www.bangkoklesbian.com) Active site run by a *faràng* (Western) lesbian, with helpful forums and news on venues. It's mainly in English.

Lesbian Adventures Thailand (www.lathailand.com) An adventure travel company owned and operated by women, exclusively for women.

Lesla (www.lesla.com) The most-established group for Thai and *faràng* lesbians, particularly younger women.

Long Yang Club (www.longyangclub.org/thailand) A 'multicultural social group for male-oriented men who want to meet outside the gay scene', with branches all over the world. The Thailand chapter hosts events in Bangkok.

Utopia (www.utopia-asia.com/thaibang.htm) Long-running and well-respected gay and lesbian website with lots of Bangkok information and member reviews.

HEALTH

While urban horror stories can make a trip to Bangkok seem frighteningly dangerous, in reality few travellers experience anything more than an upset stomach and the resulting clenched-cheek waddles to the bathroom. If

you do have a problem, Bangkok has some very good hospitals in which you can recover; see p262.

Many medications can be bought over the counter without a doctor's prescription, but it can be difficult to find some newer drugs, particularly antidepressants, blood-pressure medications and contraceptive pills. Bangkok and the surrounding regions of central Thailand are entirely malaria free, so you won't need to worry about taking any antimalarial medication if you don't plan to venture beyond that area.

Food & Water

If a place looks clean and well run and the vendor also looks clean and healthy, then the food is probably safe. In general, the food in busy restaurants is cooked and eaten quite quickly with little standing around, and is probably not reheated. The same applies to street stalls. It's worth remembering that when you first arrive the change in diet is quite likely to result in a loose stool or two, but that doesn't automatically mean you've got amoebic dysentery, so hold off a bit before rushing to the doc.

All water served in restaurants or to guests in offices or homes in Bangkok comes from purified sources. It's not necessary to ask for bottled water unless you prefer it. Reputable brands of Thai bottled water or soft drinks are generally fine. Fruit juices are made with purified water and are safe to drink. Milk in Thailand is always pasteurised.

Ice is generally produced from purified water under hygienic conditions and is therefore theoretically safe. The rule of thumb is that if it's chipped ice, it probably came from an ice block (which may not have been handled well), but if it's ice cubes or 'tubes', it was delivered from the ice factory in sealed plastic.

Medical Problems & Treatment

In Bangkok medicine is generally available over the counter for much less than it costs in the West. However, fake drugs are common so try to use reputable-looking pharmacies, and check storage conditions and expiry dates before buying anything.

AIR POLLUTION

Bangkok has a bad reputation for air pollution, and on bad days the combination of heat, dust

and motor fumes can be a powerful brew of potentially toxic air. The good news is that more efficient vehicles, fewer of them thanks to the Skytrain and Metro, and less industrial pollution mean Bangkok's skies are much cleaner than they used to be. To put it into perspective, the air is usually nearer to Singapore standards than diabolical Hong Kong. There's not much you can do to avoid air pollution, except to try to stay indoors – hello malls!

HEAT

By most people's standards Bangkok is somewhere between hot and seriously (expletive) hot all year round. Usually that will mean nothing more than sweat-soaked clothing, discomfort and excessive tiredness. However, heat exhaustion is not uncommon, and dehydration is the main contributor. Symptoms include feeling weak, headache, irritability, nausea or vomiting, sweaty skin, a fast, weak pulse and a normal or slightly elevated body temperature. Treatment involves getting out of the heat and/or sun and cooling the victim down by fanning and applying cool, wet cloths to the skin, laying the victim flat with their legs raised and rehydrating with electrolyte drinks or water containing a quarter teaspoon of salt per litre.

Heatstroke is more serious and requires more urgent action. Symptoms come on suddenly and include weakness, nausea, a hot, dry body with a temperature of more than 41°C, dizziness, confusion, loss of coordination, seizures and eventually collapse and loss of consciousness. Seek medical help and begin cooling by getting the victim out of the heat, removing their clothes, fanning them and applying cool, wet cloths or ice to their body, especially to the groin and armpits.

HIV & AIDS

In Thailand around 95% of HIV transmission occurs through sexual activity, and the remainder through natal transmission or through illicit intravenous drug use. HIV/AIDS can also be spread through infected blood transfusions, although this risk is virtually nil in Thailand due to rigorous blood-screening procedures. If you want to be pierced or tattooed, be sure to check that the needles are new.

HOLIDAYS

Chinese New Year (usually late February or early March) and Songkran (mid-April) are the

two holiday periods that most affect Bangkok. For up to a week before and after these holidays public transport in or out of the city is extremely busy, although during the holidays themselves Bangkok tends to be quiet (except in Chinatown during Chinese New Year and Th Khao San during Songkran). Because it's peak season for foreign tourists visiting Thailand, December and January can also be very tight.

See p12 for detailed information on individual festivals and holidays.

Public Holidays

Government offices and banks close their doors on the following public holidays. For the precise dates of lunar holidays, see the TAT website www.tourismthailand.org/travel-information.

New Year's Day 1 January

Makha Bucha Day January/March (lunar)

Chakri Day 6 April (commemorates the founding of the royal Chakri dynasty)

Songkran 13 to 15 April (Thai New Year)

Labor Day 1 May

Coronation Day 5 May (commemorating the 1946 coronation of the current king and queen)

Visakha Bucha Day May/June (lunar).

Khao Phansa July/August (lunar; beginning of the Buddhist rains retreat, when monks refrain from travelling away from their monasteries)

Queen's Birthday 12 August

King Chulalongkorn Day 23 October

Ok Phansa October/November (lunar; end of Buddhist rains retreat)

King's Birthday 5 December

Constitution Day 10 December

New Year's Eve 31 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Bangkok is a very well wired town. Internet cafés are scattered throughout the city, charging from about 40B per hour up to 120B. Th Khao San (Map pp68–9) has the highest concentration of internet cafés, with dozens available. Other good areas include Th Silom (Map pp108–9), Th Ploenchit and Siam Sq (Map pp98–9). Additionally, the vast majority of Bangkok guesthouses and hotels offer internet access; see the boxed text, p210, for details.

RJ11 phone jacks are the standard, though in a few older hotels and guesthouses the

WI-FI ACCESS

Wi-fi (wireless fidelity) is not hard to find in Bangkok. All Starbucks (www.starbucks.co.th) and Gloria Jean's (www.gloriajeanscoffees.com.au) coffee shops and growing number of cafés and bars offer free wi-fi services. Most top-end and midrange hotels have wi-fi, as do quite a few guesthouses, sometimes for free and sometimes available by prepaying for time; see p210 for details. Of the various websites listing Bangkok wi-fi spots www.bkkpages.com and www.stickman.com are the most comprehensive.

phones might still be hard wired. In the latter case you might be able to use a fax line in the office, since all fax machines in Thailand are connected via RJ11 jacks.

With so much free internet available, and so many net cafés, paying for a temporary dial-up internet account barely seems worth it. If you think it is, find a nearby 7-Eleven (which shouldn't take too long) and buy a prepaid card for a couple of hundred baht.

LEGAL MATTERS

Thailand's police don't enjoy a squeaky clean reputation but as a foreigner, and especially a tourist, you probably won't have much to do with them. While some expats will talk of being targeted for fines while driving, most anecdotal evidence suggests the men in tight (we're talking spray-on) brown shirts and dark aviators will usually go out of their way not to arrest a foreigner breaking minor laws.

The big exception is drug laws. Most Thai police view drug-takers as a social scourge and consequently see it as their duty to enforce the letter of the law; for others it's an opportunity to make untaxed income via bribes. Which direction they'll go often depends on drug quantities; small-time offenders are sometimes offered the chance to pay their way out of an arrest, while traffickers usually go to jail.

Smoking is banned in almost all indoor spaces, and the ban was extended to open-air public spaces in early 2008, which means lighting up outside a shopping centre, in particular, might earn you a polite request to butt out. If you throw your cigarette butt on the ground, however, you could then be hit with a hefty littering fine. Bangkok has a strong antilittering law, and police won't hesitate to cite foreigners and collect fines of 2000B.

If you are arrested for any offence, the police will allow you to make a phone call to your

embassy or consulate in Thailand if you have one, or to a friend or relative. There's a whole set of legal codes governing the length of time and manner in which you can be detained by the police before being charged or put on trial, but the police have a lot of discretion. As a foreigner, the police are more likely to bend these codes in your favour than the reverse. However, as with police worldwide, if you don't show respect to the men in brown you will only make matters worse, so keep your hair on.

Visiting Prisoners

Visiting imprisoned foreigners in Bangkok's notorious jails (p123) has become something of a fad. Visiting details are discussed on several websites, notably www.khaosanroad.com. If you want to see a particular prisoner the best approach is to first contact the prisoner's Bangkok embassy. Consular officials can tell you whether the prisoner, or any other prisoner, wants to be seen; note that they won't give names or details unless the prisoner has authorised them to do so. If so, they can help out and advise on visiting times, which are usually only a couple of days a week. Don't try going directly to the prison without a letter from the prisoner's embassy, as you might be refused entry.

Most foreign prisoners in Thai prisons are from the UK, Australia, Africa and Europe; most American prisoners are repatriated to jails in the US.

MAPS

From the moment you enter Bangkok – literally right after you've passed immigration – you'll see your first free maps. Quality varies between useful and utter rubbish, but the *Official Airport Bangkok Map* and the *City Map of Bangkok*, both usually available at the airport, will get you around the major sights, transport routes and hotels.

Maps for sale in bookshops and some 7-Elevens are better. Lonely Planet's comprehensive *Bangkok City Map*, in a handy, laminated, fold-out form, includes a walking tour and is fully indexed. One map that is often imitated but never equalled is *Nancy Chandler's Map of Bangkok* (www.nancychandler.net), a colourful hand-drawn map with useful inset panels for Chinatown, Th Sukhumvit and Chatuchak Weekend Market.

To master the city's bus system, purchase Roadway's *Bangkok Bus Map*. For visitors

who consider eating to be sightseeing, check out Ideal Map's *Good Eats* series, which has mapped mom-and-pop restaurants in three of Bangkok's noshing neighbourhoods – Chinatown, Ko Ratanakosin and Sukhumvit. Groovy Map's *Groovy Bangkok* combines up-to-date bus and transport routes and sights with a short selection of restaurant and bar reviews. Groovy Map also publishes *Roadway Bangkok*, a GPS-derived 1:40,000 driving map of the city that includes all tollways, expressways, roads and lanes labelled in Thai and English. If travelling to districts outside central Bangkok, Thinknet's *Bangkok City Atlas* is a wise way to spend 250B.

MEDICAL SERVICES

More than Thailand's main health-care hub, Bangkok has become a major destination for medical tourism, with patients flying in for treatment from all over the world. In addition to three university research hospitals, the city is home to an ever-expanding number of public and private hospitals and hundreds of private medical clinics. Bumrungrad International, widely considered the best hospital in the country, despite being a bit of a factory, has US accreditation and feels more like a hotel than a hospital; rooms have free wi-fi internet, equipment is the latest available and in the 'lobby' you'll find Starbucks and, erm, McDonalds – would you like a thick shake with that bypass?

Whether your stay is to recover from a nasty 'Thai tattoo' (burned inner right calf after a motorcycle mishap), for corrective surgery you couldn't afford or wait for at home, or for something more cosmetic – new nose, lips, breasts, Adam's apple removal – the following hospitals should be able to help. Of course, it's worth checking the websites and searching around online for feedback before booking yourself in for anything. It's worth remembering that Thai hospitals are notorious for over-prescribing drugs and overcharging for them at their own dispensaries. Doctors will often speak English, but if you need another language contact your embassy for advice (p258).

Bangkok's better private hospitals include:

Bangkok Christian Hospital (Map pp108–9; ☎ 0 2235 1000-07; www.bkkchristianhosp.th.com; 124 Th Silom; ☒ Saladaeng)

Bangkok Hospital (Map pp124–5; ☎ 0 2310 3000; www.bangkokhospital.com; 2 Soi 47, Th Phetburi Tat Mai, Bangkok)

BNH Hospital (Map p112; ☎ 0 2686 2700; www.bnhs hospital.com; 9 Th Convent; ☒ Saladaeng; ☒ Silom)

Bumrungrad International (Map pp118–19; ☎ 0 2667 1000; www.bumrungrad.com; 33 Soi 3, Th Sukhumvit; ☒ Nana or Ploenchit)

Phyathai Hospital 1 (Map pp52–3; ☎ 0 2640 1111; www.phyathai.com; 364/1 Th Si Ayuthaya; ☒ Victory Monument)

Samitivej Sukhumvit Hospital (Map pp118–19; ☎ 0 2711 8000; www.samitivej.co.th; 133 Soi 49, Th Sukhumvit; ☒ Phrom Phong)

All these hospitals have substantial ophthalmological treatment facilities. The best eye specialist in the city is **Rutnin Eye Hospital** (Map pp118–19; ☎ 0 2639 3399; www.rutnin.com; 80/1 Soi Asoke; Th Sukhumvit; ☒ Asoke; ☒ Sukhumvit).

Medical spas mixing alternative therapies, massage and detoxification have taken 'the cure' a step further. See p196 for recommendations.

Chinese Medicine

In the Sampeng–Yaowarat district, along Th Ratchawong, Th Charoen Krung, Th Yaowarat and Th Songwat, you will find many Chinese clinics and herbal dispensaries, though not so much English so bring someone to translate. Larger is the **Huachiew General Hospital** (Map pp52–3; ☎ 2223 1351; hch@huachiewhospital.com; 665 Th Bamrung Meuang), a medical facility dedicated to all aspects of traditional Chinese medicine, along with modern international medicine. The team of licensed acupuncturists at Huachiew are thought to be Thailand's most skilled, though there isn't much English spoken here.

Dentists

As you wander around Bangkok it can start to seem that there is a dental clinic on every *soi*. Or maybe two or three. Business is good in the teeth game, partly because so many *faràng* are combining their holiday with a spot of cheap root canal or some 'personal outlook' care – a sneaky teeth-whitening treatment by any other name. Suggested clinics include:

Bangkok Dental Spa (Map pp118–19; ☎ 0 2651-0807; www.bangkokdentalspa.com; 27 Methawattana Bldg, 2nd fl, Soi 19, Th Sukhumvit; ☒ Asoke; ☒ Sukhumvit) This is not a typo. Combines oral hygiene with spa services (foot and body massage).

Dental Design Clinic & Lab (Map pp118–19; ☎ 0 2261 9119; www.dentaldesignclinic-lab.com; 20 Dental Design Bldg, Soi 21, Th Sukhumvit; ☒ Asoke; ☒ Sukhumvit)

Dental Hospital (Map pp118–19; ☎ 02 2260 5000-15; www.dentalhospitalbangkok.com; 88/88 Soi 49, Th Sukhumvit; ☒ Thong Lor) A private dental clinic with fluent English-speaking dentists.

Siam Family Dental Clinic (Map pp98–9; ☎ 0 2255 6664; www.siamfamilydental.com; 292/6 Soi 4, Siam Sq; ☒ Siam) Teeth-whitening is big here.

Pharmacies

Pharmacies are plentiful in the city, and in central areas most pharmacists will speak English. If you don't find what you need at the smaller pharmacies, try one of the hospitals listed above, which stock a wider range of pharmaceuticals but also charge higher prices (and you'll need to see a doctor first). The hospital pharmacies are open 24 hours; smaller pharmacies usually open around 10am and close between 8pm and 10pm. One non-hospital pharmacy that's open 24 hours is **Foodland Supermarket Pharmacy** (Map pp118–19; ☎ 0 2254 2247; 1413 Soi 5, Th Sukhumvit; Skytrain Nana).

MONEY

Most travellers rely on credit or debit cards to access cash in Bangkok, where ATMs are almost as common as bumholes. The basic unit of Thai currency is the baht. There are 100 *satang* in one baht – though the only place you'll be able to spend them is in the ubiquitous 7-Elevens. Coins come in denominations of 25 *satang*, 50 *satang*, 1B, 5B and 10B. Paper currency comes in denominations of 20B (green), 50B (blue), 100B (red), 500B (purple) and 1000B (beige).

By Thai law, any traveller arriving in Thailand is supposed to carry at least the following amounts of money in cash, travellers cheques, bank draft or letter of credit, according to visa category: Non-Immigrant Visa, US\$500 per person or US\$1000 per family; Tourist Visa, US\$250 per person or US\$500 per family; Transit Visa or no visa, US\$125 per person or US\$250 per family. Your funds might be checked by authorities if you arrive on a one-way ticket or if you look as if you're at 'the end of the road'. There is no limit to the amount of Thai or foreign currency you may bring into Thailand. Upon leaving, you are permitted to take no more than 50,000B per person without special authorisation; exportation of foreign currencies is unrestricted.

Standard banking hours are 8.30am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday, though some

banks close at 4.30pm on Fridays, and almost every bank in Bangkok has at least one ATM. It's legal to open a foreign-currency account at any commercial bank in Thailand. As long as the funds originate from abroad, there are no restrictions on their maintenance or withdrawal.

ATMs & Credit Cards

You won't need a map to find an ATM in Bangkok – they're everywhere. Bank ATMs accept major international credit cards and many will also cough up cash (Thai baht only) if your account from home has a card affiliated with the Cirrus or Plus networks. You can withdraw up to 20,000B at a time from most ATMs.

Credit cards as well as debit cards can be used for purchases at many shops and pretty much any hotel or restaurant where you might need credit – you'll have to pay cash for your *phat thai*. The most commonly accepted cards are Visa and MasterCard, followed by Amex and JCB. To report a lost or stolen card, call the following numbers:

Amex (☎ 0 2273 5544)

MasterCard (☎ 001 800 11 887 0663)

Visa (☎ 001 800 441 3485)

Changing Money

Banks or legal moneychangers offer the optimum foreign-exchange rates. When buying baht, US dollars and euros are the most readily accepted currencies and travellers cheques receive better rates than cash. British pounds and Australian dollars are also widely accepted. As banks often charge commission and duty for each travellers cheque cashed, you'll save on commissions if you use larger cheque denominations.

Most banks can change foreign exchange but it can sometimes take significantly more time than the specialty exchange places. In tourist areas, such as the Siam Sq shopping district and Th Khao San, you'll often find small exchange counters outside banks; these can change cash and cheques in major currencies and are typically open from 8.30am to 8pm daily.

See the inside front cover for exchange rates. Current exchange rates are printed in the *Bangkok Post* and the *Nation* every day, or you can walk into any Thai bank and ask to see a daily rate sheet.

Tipping

Tipping is not a traditional part of Thai life and, except in big hotels and posh restaurants, tips are not expected. Having said that, Bangkok sees enough tipping tourists for those Thais who commonly deal with tourists to become increasingly familiar with tipping. Taxi drivers, for example, will automatically round the price up to the nearest 10B (Thais rarely insist on these coins). For most places, however, tips remain appreciated rather than expected.

NEWSPAPERS & MAGAZINES

Bangkok has a well-established English-language media and has possibly the largest concentration of freelance journalists and photographers of any city on Earth. The *Bangkok Post* (www.bangkokpost.net) is the major daily broadsheet, with local and international news as well as articles on culture, entertainment, dining and events. The *Nation* (www.nationmultimedia.com) is now a business paper and also publishes a free tabloid called *Daily Xpress*. The *International Herald Tribune* (IHT) is widely available, as are all major international magazines.

Targeting the young ones, *Guru* is a life-style insert in the Friday edition of the *Bangkok Post*. For new restaurants, current happy hours, band dates and which DJs are in town there are two good-quality independent publications: the free and irreverent weekly *BK Magazine* (www.bkmagazine.com), and the monthly *Bangkok 101*, which also has handy reviews of sights, restaurants, nightclubs and theatres, and a monthly photo essay; it costs 100B.

ORGANISED TOURS

Mastering Bangkok is the urban aficionado's version of conquering Everest. But not everyone enjoys slogging through the sprawl and heat, and for those sensible folks there are many tours available. Almost every hotel and guesthouse can book you on tours of the main historic sights, and a good number of *túk-túk* drivers will probably try their luck too (don't be tempted). Tours of the river and adjoining *khlong* are the most popular, and bicycle tours (yes, serious) are finding a growing number of happy peddlers.

River & Canal Tours

The car has long since become Bangkok's conveyance of choice, but there was a time,

and there are still places today, where roads are made of water, not asphalt. Taking to these traditional thoroughfares reveals children swimming in the muddy (or often 'filthy') waters, huge cargo barges groaning under the weight of sand being shipped to construction sites, and wake-skipping longtailed boats roaring by. At sunset the famed Wat Arun (p65) and the riverside towers of the luxury hotels are bathed in red and orange hues.

The cheapest and most local way of experiencing riverine Bangkok is by boarding the **Chao Phraya Express Boat** (☎ 0 2623 6001; www.chaophraya.boat.co.th) at any *tha* (pier) and taking it in either direction to its final stop; see p253 for details. The company also offers a one-day river pass (100B) for unlimited trips aboard the Chao Phraya Tourist Boat, which stops at 10 major piers from 9.30am to 3pm and has a distracting loudspeaker guide. Even guidebook writers who sightsee at warp speed don't find this pass offers much better value than the average 12B fare. More appealing are the Sunday trips to **Ko Kret** (adult/child 299/250B; ☎ 10am-4.30pm from Tha Sathorn or Tha Maharat) and back; see p230.

Hiring a longtail boat, sometimes known as a 'James Bond boat' after the chase scene in *The Man With the Golden Gun* that first brought them to the attention of the world, is a popular way of touring the Thonburi *khlong*. Shop around for a tour that doesn't include Wat Arun and the Royal Barge Museum, both of which can be more easily (and, let's be honest, more cheaply) visited independently. Tha Chang (Map pp52-3) is the best place to hire a boat. They can also be booked at Tha Oriental (Map pp108-9), Tha Saphan Phut (Map p84) and Tha Si Phraya (Map pp108-9); rental costs from about 400B and 800B an hour, usually nearer to 800B. You'll need two, or preferably three, hours to do it justice and, if you're on a budget, some accomplices help to split the cost.

For dinner cruises, see p164.

Asia Voyages (Map pp124-5; ☎ 0 2655 6246-8; www.asia-voyages.com; per person from 8000B) operates three stout but elegant converted rice barges called *Mekhala*, delivering passengers to Ayuthaya and Bang Pa-In as part of a two-day trip that includes an overnight stay on the boat with a candlelight dinner at the foot of a picturesque temple. Downriver trips are cheaper (from 6150B).

The restored wooden rice barges in the **Manohra Cruises** (☎ 0 2477 0770; [.com\) fleet are the grandest of all, having been converted into luxury cruisers with real character. There are several cruising options, all departing the Marriott Resort & Spa \(Map pp124-5\) take a hotel boat from Tha Sathon. The sunset \(900B, 6pm to 7pm\) and dinner cruises \(2342B, 7.30pm to 10pm\) are rightly popular if you have the change. If you have both time and money, then consider the two- or three-day trips between Bangkok and Ayuthaya, via Ko Kret and Bang Pa-In.](http://www.manohracruises</p>
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Bicycle Tours

From inside a taxi it's hard to imagine even contemplating cycling in Bangkok, which makes these trips especially cool as you discover a whole side of the city off-limits to four-wheeled transport. Half-day tours start at about 1000B, but check online for the latest prices.

Long-running **ABC Amazing Bangkok Cyclist Tour** (☎ 0 2665 6364; www.realasia.net) organises daily bike tours through a scenic riverside neighbourhood in Thonburi. You travel by longtail boat to the *khlong*-crossed villages of stilt houses, green gardens and old ladies wrapped up in market sarongs. Instead of asphalt and traffic, you'll negotiate narrow concrete pathways bridging the canal below and occasionally yielding to a few motorbikes driven by 10-year-old kids. Weekend tours also take in a floating market and what is touted as a 'super special' lunch.

Grasshopper Adventures (☎ 0 2628 7067; www.grasshopperadventures.com) offers tours of Ko Ratana-kosin and a cooler night tour to Thonburi, along with multiday trips throughout Southeast Asia.

Velo Thailand (☎ 089 201 7782; www.velothailand.com; 88 Soi 2, Th Samsen, Banglamphu) Ae, from Velo, works with Grasshopper but also operates his own tours, including the night tour to Thonburi. The bikes here are first class; rental, sales and repairs are also available. It's a very good choice.

Other Tours

Most Bangkok sights can be visited easily under your own steam, but every travel agent and most hotels can arrange guided tours of important sites. If you want a custom tour with an expert guide, and money is no objection, **Bangkok Private Tours** (www.bangkokprivatetours.com) is earning a reputation for its food tours, among others.

POST

Thailand has an efficient postal service, and both domestic and international rates are very reasonable. Bangkok's **main post office** (Communications Authority of Thailand, CAT; Map pp108-9; ☎ 0 2233 1050; Th Charoen Krung) is open from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and from 8am to 1pm Saturday and Sunday and holidays. An inexpensive packaging service can help if you've spent too much at Chatuchak Market. The parcel counter is open from 8am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday and from 8.30am to noon on Saturday; at other times an informal service is open at the centre rear of the building. If you're a Luddite, or your mum is, you might use the *poste restante* service here.

An international telecommunications service (including telephone, fax and internet) is located in a separate building in the northeast corner of the block; services are paid for with pre-paid cards that can also be used at Bangkok airports. The easiest way to reach the main post office is via the Chao Phraya Express to Si Phraya (N3) or Muang Khae (N2), both a short walk away.

Elsewhere, branch post offices are found throughout the city; ask your hotel for the nearest one.

RADIO

Bangkok has around 100 FM and AM stations broadcasting a huge range of music, talk and news. The place you're most likely to hear Thai radio is in a taxi. Given that most Bangkok cabbies are from the northeast Isaan region, expect them to be listening to *lünk thung* (Thai country music) on Luk Thung 95.0 FM. For Thai Top 40 try Hotwave 91.5 FM; for more alternative Thai tunes try Fat Radio 104.5 FM.

For a taste of what's on offer, listen to live radio online by clicking through to Thailand on www.surfmusic.de.

SAFETY

Bangkok is a safe city, and incidents of violence against tourists are rare. However, scams aimed at separating you and your hard-earned are so prevalent that the term 'gem scam' has become almost synonymous with 'Bangkok'. Con artists tend to haunt first-time tourist spots, such as the Grand Palace area, Wat Pho, the Golden Mount and Siam Sq (especially near Jim Thompson's House).

Most scams begin the same way: a friendly Thai male (or, on rarer occasions, a female) approaches and strikes up a seemingly innocuous conversation. Sometimes the con man says he's a university student or teacher; at other times he might claim to work for the World Bank or a similarly distinguished organisation. If you're on the way to Wat Pho or Jim Thompson's House, for example, he may tell you it's closed for a holiday or repairs. Eventually the conversation works its way around to the subject of the scam – the best fraudsters can actually make it seem as though you initiated the topic. The scammer might spend hours inveigling you into his trust, taking you to an alternative 'special' temple, for example, and linking with other seemingly random people, often *túk-túk* drivers, who are also in on the scam.

The scam itself almost always incorporates gems, tailor shops or card playing. With gems, the victim is invited to a gem and jewellery shop – your new-found friend is picking up some merchandise for himself and you're just along for the ride. Somewhere along the way he usually claims to have a connection in your home country (what a coincidence!) with whom he has a regular gem export-import business. One way or another, the victim is persuaded that they can turn a profit by arranging a gem purchase and reselling the merchandise at home. After all, the jewellery shop just happens to be offering a generous discount today.

There are seemingly infinite variations on the gem scam, almost all of which end up with the victim purchasing small, low-quality sapphires and posting them to their home country. Once you return home, of course, the cheap sapphires turn out to be worth much less than what you paid for them. Many have invested and lost virtually all their savings.

Even if you were able to return your purchase to the gem shop in question, chances are slim to none they'd give a full refund. The con artist who brings the mark into the shop gets a commission of 10% to 50% per sale – the shop takes the rest. The Thai police are usually of no help, believing that merchants are entitled to whatever price they can get. The main victimisers are a handful of shops who get protection from certain high-ranking government officials.

At tailor shops the objective is to get you to pay exorbitant prices for poorly made clothes. The tailoring shops that do this are adept at delaying delivery until just before you leave Thai-

land, so that you don't have time to object to poor workmanship. The way to avoid this scam is to choose tailor shops yourself and not offer any more than a small deposit – no more than enough to cover your chosen fabrics – until you're satisfied with the workmanship.

The card-playing scam starts out very similarly to the gem scenario: a friendly stranger approaches the lone traveller on the street, strikes up a conversation and then invites him or her to the house of his relative for a drink or meal. After a bit of socialising, a friend or relative of the con arrives; it just so happens a little high-stakes card game is planned for later that day. Like the gem scam, the card-game scam has many variations, but eventually the victim is shown some cheating tactics to use with help from the 'dealer', some practice sessions take place and finally the game gets under way. The mark is allowed to win a few hands first, then somehow loses a few, gets bankrolled by one of the friendly Thais, and then loses the Thai's money. Suddenly your new-found buddies aren't so friendly any more – they want the money you lost. Sooner or later you end up sucking large amounts out of the nearest ATM. Again the police won't take any action – in this case because gambling is illegal in Thailand and you've broken the law by playing cards for money.

Other minor scams involve *túk-túk* drivers, hotel employees and bar girls who take new arrivals on city tours; these almost always end in high-pressure sales pushes at silk, jewellery or handicraft shops. In this case greed isn't the ruling motivation – it's simply a matter of weak sales resistance.

The best way to avoid all this is to follow the TAT's number-one suggestion: disregard all offers of free shopping or sightseeing help from strangers. You might also try lying whenever a stranger asks how long you've been in Thailand – if it's only been three days, say three weeks! The con artists rarely prey on anyone except new arrivals.

You should contact the Tourist Police if you have any problems with consumer fraud. Call ☎ 1155 from any phone.

TAXES & REFUNDS

Thailand has a 7% value-added tax (VAT) on many goods and services. Mid-range and top-end hotels and restaurants might also add a 10% service tax. When the two are combined this becomes the 17% king hit known as 'plus plus', or '++'.

Visitors to Bangkok who depart by air and who haven't spent more than 180 days in Thailand during the previous calendar year can apply for a VAT refund on purchases made at approved stores; look for the blue and white VAT Refund sticker. Minimum purchases must add up to 2000B per store in a single day, with a minimum total of 5000B. You must get a VAT Refund form and tax invoice from the shop. Most major malls in Bangkok will direct you to a desk dealing with VAT refunds, where they will organise the appropriate paperwork (takes about five minutes).

At the airport, large items should be declared at the customs desk, which will issue the appropriate paperwork; you can then check them in. Smaller items (such as watches and jewellery) must be hand-carried as they will need to be reinspected once you've passed immigration. Either way, you actually get your money at a **VAT Refund Tourist Office** (☎ 0272 9384-5), which at Suvannabhumi are on Level 4 in both the east and west wings. For all the details, see www.rd.go.th/vrt.

TELEPHONE

The Bangkok telephone system is efficient enough for you to be able to direct-dial most major centres without trouble. Thailand's country code is ☎ 66.

Inside Thailand you must dial the area code no matter where you are. In effect, that means all numbers are nine digits; in Bangkok they begin with 02, then a seven-digit number. The only time you drop the initial 0 is when you're calling from outside Thailand. Calling the provinces will usually involve a three-digit code beginning with 0, then a six-digit number. Mobile phone numbers all have 10 digits, beginning with 08.

To direct-dial an international number from a private phone, first dial ☎ 001 or, if it's available, ☎ 007, which is significantly cheaper. For operator-assisted international calls, dial ☎ 100. For free local directory assistance call ☎ 1133 inside Bangkok.

You can direct-dial Home Country Direct access numbers from any private phone (most hotel phones won't work) in Thailand. Dial ☎ 001 999 followed by one of the numbers given on the Quick Reference page on the inside front cover. TOT offers a separate international service to 30 select countries (including Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan,

Malaysia, Singapore, UK and USA), accessed by dialling ☎ 008 first. The TOT service costs less per minute than the corresponding CAT service, so there's no reason to use the 001 route if you have a choice. For big discounts for calls to long-distance numbers or mobiles from private phones or payphones (not mobiles) within Thailand, call ☎ 1234 before the number.

A useful CAT office stands next to the main post office ([Map pp108–9](#)), and the TOT office ([Map pp98–9](#)) on Th Ploenchit is mainly an internet café but does have one phone for Home Country Direct calls – buy a phone card first.

Payphones are common throughout Bangkok, though too often they're beside the thundering traffic of a major thoroughfare. Red phones are for local calls, blue are for local and long-distance calls (within Thailand), and the green phones are for use with phonecards. Calls start at 1B for three minutes; for mobile numbers it's 3B per minute. Local calls from private phones cost 3B, with no time limit.

Internet Phone & Phonecards

The cheapest way to call internationally is via the internet, and many internet cafés in Bangkok are set up for phone calls. Some have Skype loaded and (assuming there's a working headset) you can use that for just the regular per-hour internet fee. Others might have their own VoIP service at cheap international rates.

CAT itself offers the PhoneNet card, which comes in denominations of 300B, 500B and 1000B and allows you to call overseas via Voice over Internet Protocol for a 40% to 86% saving over regular rates. The difference with PhoneNet is that you can call from any phone; landline, your mobile etc. Quality is good and rates represent excellent value; refills are available. Cards are available from any CAT office or online at www.thaitelphone.com, from which you get the necessary codes and numbers immediately. See <http://thaitelphone.com/EN/RateTable/> for rates.

That table also displays rates for CAT's standard ThaiCard, a prepaid international calling card selling for 300B and 500B. You can use the ThaiCard codes from either end, eg calling the UK from Thailand or calling Thailand from the UK. These are better value than Lenso cards, which are used from payphones.

Mobile Phones

If you have a GSM phone you will probably be able to use it on roaming in Thailand. If you have endless cash, or you only want to send text messages, you might be happy to do that. Otherwise, think about buying a local SIM card.

Buying a pre-paid SIM is as difficult as finding the nearest 7-Eleven store. The market is super-competitive and deals vary so check websites first, but expect to get a SIM, with 100 or 200 minutes, for between 99B and 300B. Per-minute rates start at less than 50 satang. Recharge cards are sold at the same stores. Calling internationally the network will have a promotional code (eg 009 instead of 001) that affords big discounts on the standard international rates, though you might have to go into a phone company office to get the full list of rates. The three main networks are:

AIS (www.one-2-call.com) Wide coverage across Thailand; One-2-Call is the pre-paid option.

DTAC (www.dtac.co.th) Lots of options, including **Happy** (www.happy.co.th) for pre-paid SIM.

True Move (www.truemove.com) Offers a Welcome SIM package for visitors, with domestic calls for 2B a minute and cheaper international rates. The network is not as good outside Bangkok.

If your phone is locked, head down to Mahaboonkrong (MBK) shopping centre (p134) to get it unlocked, or to shop for a new or cheap used phone (they start at less than 2000B).

TIME

Thailand is seven hours ahead of GMT/UTC. Thus, noon in Bangkok is 9pm the previous day in Los Angeles, midnight the same day in New York, 5am in London, 6am in Paris, 1pm in Perth, and 3pm in Sydney. Times are an hour later in countries or regions that are on Daylight Savings Time (Summer Time). Thailand does not use daylight saving. See also the World Time Zones map (p295).

The official year in Thailand is reckoned from the Western calendar year 543 BC, the beginning of the Buddhist Era, so that AD 2009 is 2552 BE, AD 2010 is 2553 BE etc. All dates in this book refer to the Western calendar.

TOILETS

If you don't want to pee against a tree like the *túk-túk* drivers, you can stop in at any shopping centre, hotel or fast-food restaurant for

facilities. Shopping centres typically charge 1B to 2B for a visit, and some of the larger shopping centres on Th Silom and Th Ploenchit have toilets for the disabled. Toilet paper is rarely provided, so carry an emergency stash or do as the locals do and use the hose (an acquired skill). In older buildings and wat you'll still find squat toilets, but in modern Bangkok expect to be greeted by a throne.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Bangkok has two organisations that handle tourism matters: the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) for country-wide information, and Bangkok Tourist Division for city-specific information. Also be aware that travel agents in the train station and near tourist centres co-opt TAT as part of their name to lure in commissions.

The **Bangkok Tourist Division** (BTD; Map p56; ☎ 0 2225 7612-4; www.bangkoktourist.com; 17/1 Th Phra Athit; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun), operated by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), has this main office near Saphan Phra Pinklao with well-informed staff and a wealth of brochures, maps and event schedules. Staff can assist with the chartering of boats at the adjacent pier. Kiosks and booths around town, and particularly in major shopping malls, are less useful, but do have maps; look for the symbol of a mahout on an elephant. The yellow-and-green **BTD tourist information booth** (Map pp68-9; ☎ 0 2281 5538; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun), opposite the Chana Songkhram police station on Th Chakraphong, close to the corner of Th Khao San, has particularly useful local bus maps.

The larger **TAT** (☎ 1672 for assistance; www.tourismthailand.org; ☎ 8am-8pm) has two main offices in Bangkok and two at Suvarnabhumi International Airport, all well-stocked with brochures and maps covering the whole country. If you need information over the phone we strongly recommend you to call the ☎ 1672 line, not the offices themselves.

Head Office (Map pp52-3; ☎ 0 2250 5500; 1600 Phetchaburi Tat Mai; Makkasan, Ratchathewi; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm)

Banglamphu (Map pp68-9; ☎ 0 2283 1555, ext 1556; cnr Th Ratchadamnoen Nok & Th Chakrapatdipong; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm) Opposite the boxing stadium. It is also home to the Tourist Police (☎ 1155; ☎ 24hr).

Suvarnabhumi International Airport (☎ 0 2134 4077; International Terminal, 2nd fl, btwn Gate 2 & 5; ☎ 8am-10pm) Also in the domestic terminal.

TAT Offices Abroad

TAT has 20 offices scattered about the globe, mainly in Europe, Asia, North America and Australia. For a full list, with exhaustive contact details, see www.tourismthailand.org/tat-oversea-office.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Bangkok presents one large, ongoing obstacle course for the mobility-impaired, with its high curbs, uneven pavements and non-stop traffic. Many of the city's streets must be crossed via pedestrian bridges flanked with steep stairways, while buses and boats don't stop long enough to accommodate even the mildly disabled. Aside from some Skytrain and Metro stations, ramps or other access points for wheelchairs are rare.

A few top-end hotels make consistent design efforts to provide disabled access. Other deluxe hotels with high employee-to-guest ratios are usually good about providing staff help where building design fails. For the rest, you're pretty much left to your own resources. These companies and websites might help:

Asia Pacific Development Centre on Disability (www.apcdproject.org)

Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality (www.sath.org)

Wheelchair Tours to Thailand (www.wheelchairtours.com)

VISAS

Thailand has been much stricter in enforcing its visa laws since the coup of 2006, but the citizens of 42 countries, including most Western European countries, Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore and the USA, can still enter Thailand without a visa and stay for up to 30 days. Citizens of Brazil, Republic of Korea and Peru may enter without a visa for 90 days. For a list of eligible countries and other visa matters, see the Royal Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs website www.mfa.go.th/web/12.php.

The crackdown, apparently designed to get rid of illegal workers and 'bad influences' such as sex tourists, has seen the once-ignored requirement of an onward ticket being more strictly enforced, usually by airline staff in the departing city. We've heard of several people who have had to buy an onward ticket and later have it refunded, with a penalty.

It should go without saying that the better dressed you are, the less likely you are to be hassled.

If you're planning to stay longer than 30 days it's best to get a 60-day tourist visa before you arrive. This can then be extended by 30 days at any visa office in the country; see [below](#).

Other Visas

Thai embassies and consulates issue a variety of other visas for people on business, students or those with employment in Thailand. The Non-Immigrant Visa comes in several classifications and is good for 90 days. If you want to stay longer than 90 days in six months, this is the one to get. If you plan to apply for a Thai work permit, you'll need a Non-Immigrant Visa first. Getting a non-immigrant visa with the intention of working in Thailand can be difficult and involves a tedious amount of paperwork. If you get one, usually with the support of an employer, you'll likely end up at the **One-Stop Service Centre** (☎ 0 2937 1155; www.boi.go.th; 16th fl, Rasa Tower, 555 Th Phahonyothin) for several hours of paper pushing – get there early!

Citizens from a list of 14 nations, including the People's Republic of China, Taiwan and several countries in Central and South Asia, can obtain a 15-day **Transit Visa** (800B). You might be required to show you have 10,000B per person or 20,000B per family to obtain this visa.

For information and discussion about all things visa, see [www.thaivisa.com](#).

Visa Extensions & Renewals

Without a long-term visa you cannot stay in Thailand for more than 90 days out of 180, and there must be a 90-day gap before you return. The 60-day Tourist Visa can be extended by up to 30 days at the discretion of Thai immigration authorities. In Bangkok, the **Immigration Bureau** (Map p112; ☎ 0 2287 3101; Soi Suan Phlu, Th Sathon Tai) does the deed; elsewhere any immigration office will do. A fee of 1900B will be charged, and you'll need the usual mug shots and photocopies of face and visa pages of your passport.

The 30-day, no-visa stay can be extended for a maximum of seven days for 1900B. Alternatively, you can plan your itinerary so you leave the country after 30 days and immediately return for a fresh 30 days. This can only be done up a total of 90 days within 180.

A seven-day extension of the 15-day Transit Visa is allowed only if you hold a passport from a country that has no Thai embassy.

If you overstay your visa the usual penalty is a fine of 500B for each extra day, with a 20,000B limit (after that, more trouble awaits). Fines can be paid at the airport or in advance at Room 416, in the Old Building at the Immigration Bureau. Children under 14 travelling with a parent do not have to pay the penalty.

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering seems to be all the rage at the moment, and Thailand is one of the favourite destinations. Most volunteering positions are in rural Thailand, but there are also plenty of possibilities in Bangkok. Working in some capacity with people who need your help can make a difference and be rewarding both to you and them. But it's not all sweetness and light, and it's important to understand what you're getting yourself into. Unless you know the country, speak the language and have skills needed in a particular field (computing, health and teaching, for example), what you can offer in a short period will largely be limited to manual labour – a commodity not in short supply in Thailand. Having said that, if you can match your skills to a project that needs them, this can be a great way to spend time in Thailand.

There are two main forms of volunteering. For those interested in a long-term commitment, typically two or three years, there are a few long-established organisations that will help you learn the language, place you in a position that will, hopefully, be appropriate to your skills, and pay you (just barely). Such organisations include:

Australian Volunteers International www.australianvolunteers.com

US Peace Corps www.peacecorps.gov

Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO Canada) www.vsocanada.org

VSO UK www.vso.org.uk

Volunteer Service Abroad (VSO NZ) www.vsa.org.nz

The more popular form of volunteering, sometimes called 'voluntourism', is something you actually pay to do. This is a fast-growing market, and a quick search for 'Thailand volunteering' will turn up pages of companies offering to place you in a project in return for some of

your hard-earned. In fairness, the projects can be very good, but some are not. With these companies you can be a volunteer for as little as a single week or up to six months or longer. Fees vary, but start at about €500 for four weeks. The list below is a starting point and should not be read as a recommendation. We have not worked with any of these companies so cannot speak for or against them. Do your own research and check out all the options before making a decision – and by all means call them up and ask all the hard questions you like about where your money will go. Locally focused organisations include **Volunthai** (www.volunthai.com), and **Thai Experience** (www.thaiexperience.org). Other general volunteering sites worth looking at are the **Global Volunteer Network** (www.volunteer.org.nz), **Idealist** (www.idealists.org) and **Volunteer Abroad** (www.volunteerabroad.com), which lists available positions with a variety of companies. Multicountry organisations that sell volunteering trips include:

Cross Cultural Solutions www.crossculturalsolutions.org

Cultural Embrace www.culturalembrace.com

Global Crossroad www.globalcrossroad.com

Global Service Corps www.globalservicecorps.org

Institute for Field Research Expeditions www.ifre.org

Open Mind Projects www.openmindprojects.org

Starfish Ventures www.starfishventures.co.uk

Transitions Abroad www.transitionsabroad.com

Travel to Teach www.travel-to-teach.org

Youth International www.youthinternational.org

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Contrary to popular myth, Thailand doesn't receive a higher percentage of male visitors than most other countries. In fact around 40% of visitors are women, a higher ratio than the worldwide average as measured by the World Tourism Organization. The overall increase for women visitors has climbed faster than that for men in almost every year since the early 1990s.

Everyday incidents of sexual harassment are much less common in Thailand than in India, Indonesia or Malaysia, and this might lure women familiar with those countries into thinking that Thailand is safer than it is. If you're a woman travelling alone it's worth pairing up with other travellers when moving around at night or, at the least, avoiding quiet areas. Make sure hotel and guesthouse rooms are secure at

night – if they're not, request another room or move to another hotel or guesthouse.

When women are attacked in Thailand it usually happens in remote beach or mountain areas, and very rarely in Bangkok. So while common sense precautions are recommended at all times, be especially vigilant if you're on a beach, and even more if you're alone and you've been drinking.

WORK

Bangkok's status as the heart of the Thai economy provides a variety of work opportunities for foreigners, and tens of thousands live and work here. Having said that, *faràng* are not allowed to work in certain professions (such as medical doctors) and it's not as easy to find a job as it is in more developed countries.

All work in Thailand requires a Thai work permit. Thai law defines work as 'exerting one's physical energy or employing one's knowledge, whether or not for wages or other benefits', so theoretically even volunteer and missionary work requires a permit. Work permits should be obtained via an employer, who may file for the permit before the employee arrives in-country. The permit itself is not issued until the employee enters Thailand on a valid Non-Immigrant Visa (see p269).

For information about work permits, contact any Thai embassy abroad or check the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs website (www.mfa.go.th/web/12.php). No joy? Seek solace and advice on the message boards of www.thaivisa.com.

Busking is illegal in Thailand, where it is legally lumped together with begging.

Teaching English

As in the rest of East and Southeast Asia, there is a high demand for English speakers to provide instruction to Thai citizens. Those with academic credentials such as teaching certificates or degrees in English as a second language will get first crack at the better-paying jobs, such as those at universities and international schools. But there are perhaps hundreds of private language-teaching establishments in Bangkok that hire noncredentialed teachers by the hour. Private tutoring is also a possibility. International oil companies pay the highest salaries for English instructors, but are also quite choosy.

A website maintained by a Bangkok-based English teacher, www.ajarn.com, has tips on finding jobs and pretty much everything else you need to know about getting into the teaching game in Thailand. If you're more dedicated (or desperate) the Yellow Pages (www.yellow.co.th/Bangkok) has contact details for hundreds of schools, universities and language schools.

LANGUAGE

Learning some Thai is a wonderful way to enhance your stay in Bangkok; naturally, the more you pick up, the closer you get to Thailand's culture and people. Your first attempts to speak the language will probably meet with mixed success, but keep trying. Listen closely to the way the Thais themselves use the various tones – you'll catch on quickly. Don't let laughter at your linguistic forays discourage you; this apparent amusement is really an expression of appreciation. Travellers are particularly urged to make the effort to meet Thai college and university students. Thai students are, by and large, eager to meet visitors from other countries. They will often know some English, so communication isn't as difficult as it may be with shop owners, civil servants etc, and they're generally willing to teach you useful Thai words and phrases.



If you'd like a more comprehensive guide to the language, get a copy of Lonely Planet's compact and comprehensive *Thai Phrasebook*.

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PRONUNCIATION

Tones

In Thai the meaning of a single syllable may be altered by means of different tones. For example, depending on the tone, the syllable *mai* can mean 'new', 'burn', 'wood', 'not?' or 'not'.

The following chart represents tones to show their relative pitch values:



The tones are explained as follows:

low tone – 'flat' like the mid tone, but pronounced at the relative bottom of one's vocal range. It is low, level and with no inflection, eg *bàht* (baht – the Thai currency).

mid tone – pronounced 'flat', at the relative middle of the speaker's vocal range, eg *dee* (good); no tone mark is used.

falling tone – sounds as if you are emphasising a word, or calling someone's name from afar, eg *mái* (no/not).

high tone – pronounced near the relative top of the vocal range, as level as possible, eg *máh* (horse).

rising tone – sounds like the inflection used by English speakers to imply a question – 'Yes?', eg *sáhm* (three).

Consonants

The majority of Thai consonants correspond closely to the English counterparts used to represent them in transliterations. The ones that will be unfamiliar to English speakers

are **ɔ̄** (pronounced like a cross between 'b' and 'p', as in 'hip**ɔ̄**g'), **ɔ̄** (pronounced like a cross between a 'd' and a 't', as in 'hard**ɔ̄**top') and **ŋ** (pronounced as in 'sing', but differing from English in that this consonant can come at the beginning of a word; practise by saying 'singing' and then leave off the 'si-').

Vowels

The many different vowel sounds and combinations in Thai can be tricky at first.

i	as in 'bit'
ee	as in 'feet'
ai	as in 'aisle'
ah	as the 'a' in 'father'
a	as in 'about'; half as long as 'ah'
aa	as the 'a' in 'bat' or 'tab'
e	as in 'hen'
air	as in English, but with no 'r' sound
eu	as the 'er' in 'fern', but with no 'r' sound
u	as in 'put'
oo	as in 'food'
ow	as in 'now'
or	as in 'torn', but with no 'r' sound
o	as in 'hot'
oh	as the 'o' in 'toe'
eu-a	a combination of eu and a
ee-a	as 'ee-ya'
oo-a	as the 'ou' in 'tour'
oo-ay	sounds like 'oo-way'
ew	as the 'ew' in 'new'
ee-o	as the 'io' in 'Rio'
aa-ou	as the 'a' in 'cat' followed by a short 'u' as in 'put'
eh-ou	as the 'e' in bed, followed by a short 'u' as in 'put'
oy	as in 'toy'

SOCIAL

Meeting People

Hello.	
สวัสดี	sà-wàt-dee
(ครับ/ค่ะ)	(kráp/ká) (to m/f)
Goodbye.	
ลาก่อน	lah gòrn
Please.	
กรุณา	gà-rú-nah
Thank you (very much).	
ขอบคุณ(มาก)	kòrp kun (màhk)
Yes.	
ใช่	chài
No.	
ไม่ใช่	mài chài
I	
ผม/ดิฉัน	pòm/dì-chăn (m/f)
you	
คุณ	kun
Do you speak English?	
คุณพูดภาษา	kun pòot pah-sáh
อังกฤษได้ไหม	ang-grít dái mǎi?
Do you understand?	
เข้าใจไหม	ków jai mǎi?
I understand.	
เข้าใจ	ków jai
I don't understand.	
ไม่เข้าใจ	mài ków jai
Could you please ...?	
ขอ...ได้ไหม	
kór ... dái mǎi?	
repeat that	
พูดอีกที	pòot èek tee
speak more slowly	
พูดช้าลง	pòot cháh long
write it down	
เขียนให้	kêe-an hái
Going Out	
What's on ...?	
มีอะไรทำ...	
mee à-rai tam ...?	
locally	
แถวๆนี้	tǎa-ou-tǎa-ou née
this weekend	
เสาร์อาทิตย์นี้	sǎw ah-tít née

today	
วันนี้	wan née
tonight	
คืนนี้	keun née

Where are the ...?

...อยู่ที่ไหน	
... yòo tée nǎi?	
clubs	
ไนท์คลับ	nai kláp
gay venues	
สถานบันเทิงเกย์	sà-tǎhn ban-teung gair
places to eat	
ร้านอาหาร	ráhn ah-háhn
pubs	
ผับ	pàp

Is there a local entertainment guide?

มีคู่มือสถานบันเทิงบริเวณนี้ไหม
mee kóo meu sà-tǎhn ban-teung
bor-rí-waim née mǎi?

PRACTICAL

Question Words

Who?	ใคร	krai?
What?	อะไร	à-rai?
When?	เมื่อไร	mèu-a rai?
Where?	ที่ไหน	tée nǎi?
How?	อย่างไร	yàhng rai?

Numbers & Amounts

0	ศูนย์	sóon
1	หนึ่ง	nèung
2	สอง	sòrng
3	สาม	sáhm
4	สี่	sèe
5	ห้า	háh
6	หก	hòk
7	เจ็ด	jèt
8	แปด	̀bàat
9	เก้า	gów
10	สิบ	síp
11	สิบเอ็ด	síp-èt
12	สิบสอง	síp-sòrng
13	สิบสาม	síp-sáhm

14	สิบสี่	sip-sèe
15	สิบห้า	sip-háh
16	สิบหก	sip-hòk
17	สิบเจ็ด	sip-jèt
18	สิบแปด	sip-Bàat
19	สิบเก้า	sip-gów
20	ยี่สิบ	yée-sip
21	ยี่สิบเอ็ด	yée-sip-èt
22	ยี่สิบสอง	yée-sip-sòrng
30	สามสิบ	sähm-sip
40	สี่สิบ	sèe-sip
50	ห้าสิบ	háh-sip
60	หกสิบ	hòk-sip
70	เจ็ดสิบ	jèt-sip
80	แปดสิบ	Bàat-sip
90	เก้าสิบ	gów-sip
100	หนึ่งร้อย	nèung róy
1000	หนึ่งพัน	nèung pan
2000	สองพัน	sòrng pan
10,000	หนึ่งหมื่น	nèung mèn
100,000	หนึ่งแสน	nèung sään
1,000,000	หนึ่งล้าน	nèung láhn

Days

Monday	วันจันทร์	wan jan
Tuesday	วันอังคาร	wan ang-kahn
Wednesday	วันพุธ	wan pút
Thursday	วันพฤหัสบดี	wan pà-réu-hàt
Friday	วันศุกร์	wan sùk
Saturday	วันเสาร์	wan sów
Sunday	วันอาทิตย์	wan ah-tít

Banking

I'd like to ...

อยากจะ...

yàhkjà ...
change money

แลกเงิน làak ngeun

change some travellers cheques

แลกเช็คเดินทาง làak chék deun tahng

Where's the nearest ...?

... ที่ใกล้เคียงงอยู่ที่ไหน

... tée glái kee-ang yòo tée nài?

ATM
ตู้เอทีเอ็ม
dóo air-tee-em
foreign exchange office
ที่แลกเปลี่ยนต่างประเทศ
tée làak ngeun dàhng Brà-tèt

Post

Where is the post office?

ที่ทำการไปรษณีย์อยู่ที่ไหน
tée tam gahn Brai-sà-nee yòo tée nài?

I want to send a ...

อยากจะส่ง...

yàhkjà sòng ...

fax

แฟกซ์ fàak

parcel

พัสดุ pát-sà-dù

postcard

ไปรษณียบัตร Brai-sà-nee-yá-bàt

I want to buy ...

อยากจะซื้อ...

yàhkjà séu ...

an envelope

ซองจดหมาย sòrng jòt-mái

a stamp

แสตมป์ sà-daam

Phones & Mobiles

I want to buy a phone card.

อยากจะซื้อบัตรโทรศัพท์

yàhkjà séu bàt toh-rá-sàp

I want to make a call to ...

อยากจะโทรไป...

yàhkjà toh 'bai ...

reverse-charge/collect call

เก็บปลายทาง

gèp Blai tahng

I'd like a/an ...

ต้องการ...

dórng gahn ...

adaptor plug

ปลั๊กต่อ

Blák dòr

charger for my phone

เครื่องชาร์จสำหรับโทรศัพท์

kréu-ang cháht sām-ràp toh-rá-sàp

mobile/cell phone for hire

เช่าโทรศัพท์มือถือ

chów toh-rá-sàp meu tēju

prepaid mobile/cell phone

โทรศัพท์มือถือแบบจ่ายล่วงหน้า

toh-rá-sàp meu tēju bàap jài lóo-ang nahn

SIM card for the ... network

บัตรซิมสำหรับเครือข่ายของ...

bàt sim sām-ràp kreua kài kórng ...

Internet

Where's the local Internet café?

ร้านอินเทอร์เน็ตอยู่ที่ไหน

ráhn in-deu-nét yòo tée nài?

I'd like to ...

อยากจะ...

yàhkjà ...

check my email

ตรวจอีเมล dròo-at ee-mehn

get online

ต่ออินเทอร์เน็ต dòr in-deu-nét

Transport

What time does the ... leave?

... จะออกกี่โมง

... jà òrk gèe mohng?

bus

รถเมล์ rót mair

ferry

เรือข้ามฟาก reu-a káhm fàhk

train

รถไฟ rót fai

What time's the ... bus?

รถเมล์...มากี่โมง

rót mair ... mah gèe mohng?

first

คันแรก kan râak

last

คันสุดท้าย kan sùt tái

next

คันต่อไป kan dòr 'bai

Are you free? (taxi)

ว่างไหม wáhng mái?

Please put the meter on.

เปิดมิเตอร์ด้วยหน่วย

Bèut mí-deu dóo-ay

nòy

How much is it to ...?

ไป...เท่าไร

Bai ... tów-rai?

Please take me to ...

ขอพาไป... kǒr pah 'bai ...

FOOD

breakfast

อาหารเช้า ah-háhn chów

lunch

อาหารเที่ยง ah-háhn tée-ang

dinner

อาหารเย็น ah-háhn yen

snack

อาหารว่าง ah-háhn wáhng

Can you recommend a ...

แนะนำ...ได้ไหม

náa-nam ... dái mái?

bar/pub

บาร์/ผับ bah/pàp

café

ร้านกาแฟ ráhn gah-faa

restaurant

ร้านอาหาร ráhn ah-háhn

For more detailed information on food and dining out, see p144.

EMERGENCIES

It's an emergency!

เป็นเหตุฉุกเฉิน

'Ben hèt chùk chéun!

Could you please help me/us?

ช่วยได้ไหม

chóo-ay dái mái?

Call the police/a doctor/an ambulance!

ตามตำรวจ/หมอ/รถพยาบาลด้วย

dáhm dam-ròo-at/mǒr/rót pá-yah-bahn

dóo-ay!

Where's the police station?

สถานีตำรวจที่ใกล้เคียงงอยู่ที่ไหน

sà-táh-nee dam-ròo-at tée glái kee-ang yòo

tée nài?

HEALTH

Where's the nearest ...?

... ที่ใกล้เคียงงอยู่ที่ไหน

... tée glái kee-ang yòo tée nài?

chemist

ร้านขายยา ráhn kái yah

doctor/dentist

หมอ/หมอฟัน mǒr/mǒr fan

hospital

โรงพยาบาล rohng pá-yah-bahn

I need a doctor (who speaks English).

ต้องการหมอ(ที่พูดภาษาอังกฤษได้)
dǒrng gahn mǒr (têe pǒot pah-sǎh
ang-grit dǎi)

Could the doctor come here?

หมอมาที่นี่ได้ไหม

mǒr mah têe nêe dǎi mǎi

I'm sick.

ผม/ดิฉันป่วย

pǒm/di-chǎn 'Bòo-ay (m/f)

I have (a) ...

ผม/ดิฉัน...

pǒm (m)/di-chǎn (f) ...

diarrhoea

เป็นโรคท้องร่วง 'Ben rôhk tǒrng

ròo-ang

fever

เป็นไข้

'Ben kái

sore throat

เจ็บคอ

jèp kor

headache

ปวดหัว

'Bòo-at hǒo-a

pain

เจ็บปวด

jèp 'Bòo-at

GLOSSARY

baht – Thai currency

BMA – Bangkok Metropolitan Administration

BTS – Bangkok Mass Transit System

CAT – Communications Authority of Thailand

faràng – foreigner of European descent

Isan – *isǎn*; general term for northeastern Thailand, from the Sanskrit name for the medieval kingdom Isana, which encompassed parts of Cambodia and northeastern Thailand.khlong – *khlawng*; canal

MRTA – Metropolitan Rapid Transit Authority; agency responsible for the Metro subway.

rai – Thai unit of measurement (area); 1 rai = 1600 sq metres

Ratanakosin – style of architecture present in the late 19th to early 20th century, which combines traditional Thai and European forms; also known as 'old Bangkok'

reua hǎang yao – longtail boat

rót fai fáa – BTS Skytrain

rót fai fáa máhǎanákhwǎn – MRTA subway

soi – *saw*; lane or small road

TAT – Tourist Authority of Thailand

tha – *tháa*; pier

THAI – Thai Airways International

thanon – *thán* (abbreviated 'Th' in this guide); road or street

TOT – Telephone Organisation of Thailand

trok – *trǎwk*; alleyway

wat – Buddhist temple, monastery