



## INSIDER'S GUIDE TO THAILAND

By thinking a little about your holiday destination before you travel, and taking some simple steps when you are there, you can gain so much more from your holiday. You will also be making a positive contribution to the people and the places you visit.

### THAILAND

Thailand is a popular long-haul destination for UK holidaymakers. It is a country that encompasses ancient and modern ways of life. It has everything that a visitor could want, beautiful beaches, misty mountains, jungles, magical islands, markets, good shopping and of course smiles! Thais are a very warm and welcoming people

#### – TAKE AS LITTLE EXCESS PACKAGING AS POSSIBLE

The country's waste disposal methods, especially in rural areas, are not always very sophisticated. Before you leave home, remove any unnecessary external packaging from anything you're taking with you.

#### – USE THE THAI 'WAI'

When greeting, thanking or bidding farewell, use the 'wai'. Put your two hands together at chest level, bend your head forwards until your forehead touches the tips of your fingers. Wai people of the same age or older, you don't need to do it with children or people significantly younger than you. The key principle to using the wai is based on hierarchy, centred primarily on age – you wai first to someone more senior, and you respond with a lower wai to anyone lower in rank if they wai you first. If in doubt, smiling and nodding are also acceptable as getting it wrong can be embarrassing to the recipient (e.g. adults initiating a wai to a child may embarrass the child).

#### – HELP PRESERVE THAILAND'S CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Thailand is an ancient country and there is a lot for visitors to learn and enjoy. Ask lots of questions and show enthusiasm! Guidebooks are a useful source of information, but get 'insider' knowledge by talking to local people, explore places away from the main tourist 'sights' and get closer to the country you have come to visit.

#### – PLEASE WEAR MODEST CLOTHING, ESPECIALLY IN SACRED SITES OR RURAL AREAS.

Clothes covering the knees and shoulders are most appropriate. Thailand is a very diverse country, and you will see local people wearing a wide variety of clothes. However, if you 'play safe' you will earn respect from ordinary Thais. Please also be aware that many beach areas in Thailand are in what used to be predominantly Islamic communities, so topless sunbathing in these areas is very much frowned on. It will, in any case, tend to attract the worst kind of gawking from young Thai men so is best avoided for the comfort of the sunbather too!

#### – THAIS BELIEVE THAT THE FEET ARE THE 'LOWEST' PART OF THE BODY AND THE HEAD IS SACRED.

Please don't rest your feet in high places, or move objects with your feet and never point your feet at monks or Buddha images. Please take off your shoes before entering local houses. Please don't touch anyone on the head. These ideas of "low" and "high" associations cover most objects and seniority in human relations, and are central to most good manners – for example, don't put your hat on the floor, or your shoes on the table, don't sit on a pillow, don't point with a broom etc.

#### – PLEASE DO NOT OFFER OPINIONS ON THE KING

The King is revered in Thailand and it is extremely upsetting for Thais if visitors criticize the king or enter into any 'debate' about his role.

#### – WHEN VISITING MONASTERIES

If you are female, please don't sit next to, or hand anything directly to a Buddhist monk. Monks are also forbidden to speak with any female one to one.

#### – ASK PERMISSION BEFORE TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS

Monks, farmers and children etc., are real people. Please ask before snapping – what seems strange or exotic to visitors, is just daily life for local families.

#### – PLEASE STAY CALM IF THERE ARE ANY PROBLEMS

The Thai way of resolving conflict is to stay calm, so please don't lose your temper. You'll go a long way in Thailand with patience. Thai people dislike arguments or confrontations, particularly in a public place. If you have a problem, please try to make a polite request, rather than a criticism. For example, instead of saying 'there is something wrong with my shower', say 'I was wondering if you could help me please. I wasn't able to turn on the hot water in my shower'.

#### – PLEASE DON'T SHOW AFFECTION IN PUBLIC

Be aware that kissing in public is culturally inappropriate and makes local people feel very uncomfortable. In research carried out on cultural conflict in tourism, this was the most offensive practice of tourists for Thai communities.



**– PLEASE DO NOT DISTURB ANIMAL AND PLANT LIFE.**

Animals and plants could be rare, fragile, sacred, or even harmful to your health. Please be sure that you don't buy any products made from endangered plants or wild animals, including hardwoods, corals, shells, starfish, ivory, fur, feathers, skins, horn, teeth, eggs, reptiles and turtles. For more information on endangered species and the WWF-UK Souvenir Alert Campaign for tourists and to find out how to report a concern, visit [www.wwf-uk.org](http://www.wwf-uk.org).

**– PLEASE DON'T HAVE YOUR PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN WITH ANY 'WILD' ANIMALS**

used as photographic props on the beach. Many of these animals live in appalling conditions and are often mistreated and disposed of when they get too large or difficult to handle. Having your photo taken with them only serves to propagate their suffering. Think twice about taking camel rides on the beach, as you do not know how these animals are treated once out of sight.

**– PLEASE DON'T GIVE GIFTS, MONEY OR SWEETS DIRECTLY TO SMALL CHILDREN**

This encourages begging and it is much better to play with the kids and make a contribution towards a local project – ask your tour representative or at your accommodation to find out how best to do this.

**– LOOK FOR GIFTS AND SOUVENIRS MADE IN THAILAND**

The well-being of the country is greatly influenced by the spending habits of its visitors. When you're buying gifts and souvenirs, look for goods that originate in Thailand. Buying local crafts and produce – particularly in small villages - will help local families make a decent living out of tourism. Try to take a regional perspective too, so in the South of Thailand ask for Southern products rather than anything from Thailand. Asking at hotels etc., is also a good way of encouraging hotel staff to take these interests and needs into account.

**– WHEN TAKING AN EXCURSION, TAKE THE TIME TO FIND OUT IF THE TOUR USES LOCAL GUIDES**

Please don't buy the cheapest rural tour you can find. These pay the lowest wages to staff and often don't involve the people in the villages you go to visit, giving them no influence over or benefit from your trip. A slightly more expensive tour will be better run, will give you a richer experience and village families will benefit by being able to supply goods and services to make your visit truly memorable. Visitors who are seeking a really insightful local experience should consider a Community Based Tourism trip, where local people are actively involved in local tourism development and management. For more info about CBT in more than 30 communities around Thailand contact Responsible Ecological Social Tours Project (REST) ([www.rest.or.th](http://www.rest.or.th) / [rest@asiaaccess.net.th](mailto:rest@asiaaccess.net.th))

**– CHOOSE LOCAL FOOD AND DRINK**

Make sure you drink and eat in locally-owned cafes, bars and restaurants. This will give you the real taste of Thailand and will help put money in to the local economy.

**– HIRE A CAR ONLY WHEN YOU NEED TO**

Using public transport, bicycles and walking are 'environmentally friendlier' alternatives and a great way to meet local people. [You also see more if you walk or cycle](#). Check out alternative with your travel / accommodation provider.

**– PLEASE USE WATER SPARINGLY**

There are often water shortages on the Thai islands due to the excessive demand from tourism. These shortages may not reach visitors, but they will certainly affect local families, so please take care. Take quick showers instead of baths and inform staff if you are happy to re-use towels and bed linen rather than having them replaced daily.

**– USE ENERGY WISELY**

Turn down / off heating or air conditioning when not required. Switch off lights when leaving a room and turn the TV off rather than leaving it on standby

**– PLEASE STAY AWAY FROM DRUGS**

Legal penalties are very strict and very well enforced.

**– DO REPORT ANY UNUSUAL INCIDENTS**

Child sex tourism is a criminal offence in Thailand. If you would like to report an incident, contact Crimestoppers – if overseas +44 800 555 111 or 0800 555 111 in the UK (freephone). Or contact ECPAT UK (End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking) – [www.ecpat.org](http://www.ecpat.org) - +44 207 501 8927.

**FOR MORE INSIDER KNOWLEDGE**

[www.tourismthailand.org](http://www.tourismthailand.org)  
<http://www.cbt-i.org/main.php?&lang=en>  
[www.rest.or.th](http://www.rest.or.th)  
[www.makeholidaysgreener.org.uk](http://www.makeholidaysgreener.org.uk)