

## **Geography:**

**The Kingdom of Thailand** lies in the heart of Southeast Asia, making it a natural gateway to Indochina, Myanmar and Southern China. Its shape and geography is divided into four natural regions: the mountains and forests of the North; the vast rice fields of the Central Plains; the semi-arid farm lands of the Northeast plateau; and the tropical islands and long coastline of the southern peninsula.

The country comprises 76 provinces that are further divided into districts, sub-districts and villages. Bangkok is the capital city and centre of political, commercial, industrial and cultural activities. It is also the seat of Thailand's revered Royal Family, with His Majesty the King recognized as Head of State, Head of the Armed Forces, Upholder of the Buddhist religion and Upholder of all religions.

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy with His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, or King Rama IX, the ninth king of the Chakri Dynasty, the present king. The King has reigned for more than half a century, making him the longest reigning Thai monarch. Thailand embraces a rich diversity of cultures and traditions. With its proud history, tropical climate and renowned hospitality, the Kingdom is a never-ending source of fascination and pleasure for international visitors.

## **Population:**

Thais are well-known for their friendliness and hospitality. A large majority of over 62 million citizens of Thailand are ethnic Thai, along with strong communities whose ethnic origins lie in China, India and elsewhere. About 7 million people reside in the capital city of Bangkok.

## **People:**

Thai (80%), Chinese (10%), Malay (3%), and the rest are minorities (Mons, Khmers, hill tribes) Ethnic Thais form the majority, though the area has historically been a migratory crossroads, and has thus produced a degree of ethnic diversity. Integration is such, however, that culturally and socially there is astounding unity.

## **Language:**

Spoken and written Thai is largely incomprehensible to the casual visitor. However, English is widely understood, particularly in Bangkok where it is almost the major commercial language. English and some European Languages are spoken in most hotels, shops and restaurants in major tourist destinations, and Thai-English road and street signs are found nationwide.

## **Religion:**

Buddhism (95%), Muslim (4%), others (1%)

### **Government:**

Thailand has had a constitutional monarchy since 1932. Parliament is composed of 2 houses, The House of Representatives and the Senate. Both, representatives and senators are elected by the people. A prime minister elected from among the representatives leads the government. The country is divided into 76 provinces. The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration comes under an elected governor. Appointed provincial governors administer the other 75 provinces (Changwat), which are divided into districts (Amphoe), sub-districts (Tambon) and villages (Mu Ban).

### **Clothing:**

Light, cool clothes are sensible and a jacket is needed for formal meetings and dining in top restaurants. Shorts (except knee length walking shorts), sleeveless shirts, tank tops and other beach-style attire are considered inappropriate dress when not actually at the beach or in a resort area.

### **Internet Services:**

Thailand has been expanding its information service for residents and tourists alike through the Internet system. Services are now available at Thailand's leading hotels and at the many "Cyber-Cafes" that are cropping up in all major tourist destinations.

### **Agriculture:**

Some 40% of the total land area is cultivated. Like in most Southeast Asian countries, the main agricultural produce in terms of value is **rice**, though the sheer volumes of raw produce are higher for sugar cane and tapioca. **Rice paddies** cover some 73,000sqkm (7.3m hectares, 18m acres), almost 15% of the country's area.

According to the **Statesmen's Yearbook**, 128<sup>th</sup> edition for 1991-1992, the output of the major crops in 1989 was (in 1,000 tons): **sugar cane** 33,560; **tapioca** 22,312; **rice** 21,400; **maize** 4,100; **coconut** 1,140; **soybeans** 610; **mung beans** 355; **groundnuts** 177; **jute** and **kenaf** (ambary, *Hibiscus cannabinus*, yielding a fiber used in canvas and cordage) 165; **cotton** 103; **kapok** and **bambax** fibre 42; **castor seeds** 34; **sesame** 29; **tobacco** 28.5. **Rubber** production in 1989 stood at 1,131,000 tons

**Livestock** was counted in 1988 as follows (in 1,000): Poultry 101,000; buffaloes 6,000; cattle 5,000; pigs 4,260; sheep 95; goats 80; horses 19.

In 1989 the catch of **sea fish** was 2.6m tons including 0.23m tons of marine prawns and shrimps; 165,000 tons of **freshwater fish** were produced.

## **Cuisine:**

For eating out, Thailand in general, and Bangkok in particular, offer some of the **greatest bargains** available on this globe. This is the case for Thai cuisine as well as Western fare. The only exception is **beer** - not because restaurants charge an exceptionally high mark-up on drinks (even at stores beer is priced higher than in Europe); the reason is a heavy tax. In **simple restaurants**, a small bottle of beer costs more than the meal itself. It's a tax levied especially on foreigners in the kingdom as Thais prefer the national beverage **Mekong**, a whiskey more reasonably priced than beer.

## **Drinks:**

It has already been mentioned that **beer** is priced in Thailand rather as a luxury. However, for those who don't want to miss their liquid bread, there are two excellent brands, **Singha** and **Kloster**. Both breweries have a strong German influence.

**Drinking water** of an excellent quality is found in Bangkok. Of course we are not talking of tap water in hotels or homes. Though it is alleged that faucet water in Bangkok is potable, there is widely available at very low prices **bottled drinking water** of the best quality.

For more information, please visit the following websites:

<http://www.tourismthailand.org/>

<http://www.mfa.go.th/web/14.php>

[http://www.cockatoo.com/english/thailand/thailand\\_facts.htm](http://www.cockatoo.com/english/thailand/thailand_facts.htm)

<http://sunsite.nus.edu.sg/SEALinks/thailand-info.html>

<http://www.thailandtravelguide.com/>

<http://www.sino.net/thailand-tourist-guides/>

<http://www.visit-thailand.info/>

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/asia/thailand/>