

Thailand in brief

General Information

Official Name	Kingdom of Thailand
Short Form	Thailand (meaning Land of the Free), or Siam ,the country's name used until the year 1949
Term of Citizenship	Thai
Capital	Bangkok (or Krung Thep, in Thai, which means City of Angel)
Geographical Location	Located in the heart of mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand is a country of mountains, hills, plains and a long coastline along the Gulf of Thailand (1,875 km) and the Andaman Sea (740 km), not including the coastlines of some 400 islands, most of them in the Andaman Sea.Its continental co-ordinates are latitudes 20° 28' N and 5° 36' S and longitudes 105° 38' E and 97° 22' W.To the north Thailand borders the Lao PDR and Myanmar; to the east the Lao PDR and Cambodia; to the south Malaysia; and to the west Myanmar. The country's land-based maximum north-south extent is approximately 1,600 km, and its maximum east-west extent measures approximately 870 km.
Area	The land area amounts to approximately 514,000 sq. km. The maritime economic zones cover 72,200 sq. km. in the

Andaman Sea and 140,000 sq. km. in the Gulf of Thailand, totaling 212,200 sq. km

Population

Thailand is a multi-ethnic nation with a population of 64.1 million.

Climate

Thailand's climate ranges from the sub-tropical to the tropical zones, with three distinct seasons: a hot and dry season from February to May, a monsoon season from June to October, and a cooler, dry season from November to January. Average seasonal temperatures vary between a low of 23.0 °C and a high of 32.2 °C.

Language

Thai is the national and official language. It is a tonal language with different dialects. Its script was created in 1283 by King Ramkhamhaeng the Great of the Sukhothai Kingdom. Other languages spoken include Chinese and Malay. English, a compulsory subject of secondary school curricula, is widely spoken and understood throughout the country.

Currency

Thailand's currency unit is the Baht, which is divided into 100 satangs. Notes are in 20 baht (green), 50 baht (blue), 100 baht (red), 500 baht (purple), and 1,000 baht (brown) denominations. The exchange rates against the US dollars averaged out at 31.0 baht to US\$ 1 in 2012. Coins are valued at 25 and 50 satangs (brass-colored), 1 baht (nickel), 2 baht (brass/nickel), 5 baht (nickel with copper rim), and 10 baht (nickel with a brass center).

National Flag	Five horizontal bands of red, white and blue represent unity of the nation, purity of religion, and the monarchy, respectively.
Religion	The majority of Thais (over 90 per cent) are Buddhists, although other major religions are practiced. These include Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism. The Constitution makes no mention of any religion or sect as a national religion and grants complete freedom of worship for all Thai citizens.
Form of Government	Thailand is a parliamentary (bi-cameral) democracy with a constitutional monarchy.
National symbols	The Sala Thai (Thai Pavilion) is the country's architectural symbol reflecting the skill of Thai craftsmen. Chang Thai (Thai elephant or <i>Elephas maximus indicus</i>) is a symbol historically and traditionally associated with Thailand. The national plant is the Rachaphruek (<i>Cassia fistula Linn</i>), known as the Piper Tree or Indian Laburnum in English.
Main Exports	Main exports comprise manufacturing products (74%), agricultural products (13%), agro-industrial products (8%), and mining and others (5%). Major manufacturing products are automobiles and automotive parts, computers and components, jewelry, rubber products, plastic pellets, and chemical products. As for agricultural products, major export items are natural rubber, rice, tapioca products, processed chicken, frozen seafood products, and chilled

fruits and vegetables. Agro-industrial products include sugar and canned and processed food.

History

Thailand encompasses some of the oldest settled areas in the world. *Homo erectus*, dated to between 1.6-0.5 million years ago, has been discovered here. Later prehistoric periods include the emergence of agriculture some 6,000-7,000 years ago, the Bronze Age around 4,000 years ago, and an early form of urbanization at about 2,300-2,500 years ago. Chinese records also mention the existence of towns and cities in several parts of Thailand. An early peak in population was reached between 600 and 1400 AD, with towns and large settlements surrounded by walls and moats. The kingdoms of Sukhothai and Lan Na, among other Thai principalities, were firmly established by the 13th century, when the classic and distinctively Thai style of arts, crafts and architecture was formed. Greater political and cultural achievements were attained with the emergence of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya (1350-1767 AD), known historically for its far-reaching diplomacy and commerce. Following the destruction of Ayutthaya in 1761, the Thai armed forces moved south to Thon Buri to regroup and restore their kingdom. The center of power moved across the Chao Phraya River, when Krung Thep, internationally known as Bangkok, was founded in 1782. Since then the Royal House of Chakri has reigned over the Kingdom.

Monarchy

The institution of the monarchy in Thailand is in many ways unique. Not only does it have a history going back more than seven hundred years, but it has also managed to preserve its relevance in the contemporary world. A constitutional monarchy since the promulgation of the Kingdom's first constitution in 1932, the institution today continues to command deep,

universal respect and serves as a guiding light and unifying force for the country, a focal point that brings together people from all backgrounds and shades of political thought and gives them an intense awareness of being Thai. The love and reverence the Thai people have for their King stem in large part from the moral authority His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej The Great has earned during his reign, one that involves a remarkable degree of personal contact with the people. At the same time, it is rooted in attitudes that can be traced to the earliest days of Thailand as a nation state and in some of the past monarchs who continue to serve as models of kingship. Thai concepts of monarchy have their origins in Sukhothai, founded in the early part of the 13th century and generally regarded as the first truly independent Thai kingdom. Here, particularly under the reign of King Ramkhamhaeng the Great (1275-1317 AD), was born the ideal of a paternalistic ruler alert to the needs of his people and aware of the fact that his duty was to guide them. Such forms part of *Dasavidha-rajadhamma*, or the ten precepts of kingship, which – rooted in the tradition of Theravada Buddhism – encompasses such virtues as willingness to give and sacrifice for a greater good, morality, honesty, open-mindedness, diligence, compassion, perseverance and righteousness. With the founding of the Chakri dynasty in 1782 and the establishment of Bangkok as the capital, the kingship was based primarily on adherence to the said Buddhist concepts of virtue, which indeed has served to the present day as a code of conduct of a Thai monarch and made the monarchical institution one that is responsive to the needs of the people. The Bangkok period has produced a succession of able kings, capable of meeting a variety of challenges to the country, to the people as well as to the monarchy itself. Today, Thailand is a constitutional monarchy with a democratic form of government. The Thai monarch reigns, but does not rule. He discharges his roles in accordance with the country's constitution and remains above partisan politics, while continuing to

contribute to the development and well-being of the Kingdom and its people.

Politics

Thailand is a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy. After the country went through a peaceful transformation in 1932, sovereign power came to belong to the Thai people, with the King as the Head of State who is above partisan politics and discharges his role in accordance with the country's Constitution. The administration of the country is carried out by the prime minister – elected through an open vote by members of the House of Representatives – and the cabinet that the prime minister forms. The Kingdom has a bi-cameral legislature and an independent judiciary. Despite periods of political turbulence, Thailand's political history reflects the country's unwavering commitment toward becoming a full-fledged, multi-party democracy, with accountability, transparency, good governance, as well as respect for human rights and the rule of law being among its main guiding principles. The Thai people and civil society organizations are increasingly taking part in political activities, enjoying the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. With the resiliency and fundamental strengths of the Thai society, the country has been able to continue its stride along the path of development, guided by the traditional Thai traits of tolerance, common sense and preference for peaceful solutions to problems. Over the past decades, there has been a remarkable continuity in policy direction, providing a predictable framework for investors and businessmen. Successive Thai governments have always been committed to certain fundamental policy principles: friendly relations with all its neighbors and a responsible and constructive foreign policy, an open-market economy, hospitality toward foreign investors and tourists, sound macro-economic policies with fiscal and monetary prudence and the

improvement of the country's infrastructure to increase competitiveness and achieve sustainable development. These policies are underpinned, among others, by the vibrant private sector and the strength and continuity of the civil service of the nation, which oversees the implementation of policies and execution of laws throughout the country.

Economy

Thailand is Southeast Asia's second largest economy with a nominal gross domestic product (GDP) of around USD 500 billion. With a free-market economy, the Kingdom has a strong domestic market and a growing middle class, with the private sector being the main engine of growth. The Thai economy is well integrated into the global marketplace, with exports accounting for over 70 percent of the Kingdom's GDP. Thailand also has a strong industrial sector (40 percent of GDP) and a robust and growing services sector (50 percent of GDP) centered on the tourism and financial services industries. Though traditionally an agrarian society and historically one of the world's few net food exporters, the agricultural sector today accounts for approximately 9 percent of the country's GDP.

Given the importance of exports to Thailand, it has been a leader in the region in terms of trade liberalization and facilitation with the rest of the world, starting with its Asian neighbors. Thailand is a key player in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), enjoying a strategic location that provides easy access to a larger market of over 660 million people, making it a community of connectivity, a single market and production base. Furthermore, Thailand's convenient access to China and India, as well as to other East Asian countries such as Japan and the Republic of Korea, takes this huge consumer market to even bigger proportions.

Thailand's friendly relations and expanding networks of free trade agreements with other countries have further opened up trade access to

markets both within and outside the region. These, coupled with the Kingdom's strategic positioning, have made the country a regional center for international travel and trade, as well as a hub for various industries, of which the most notable are the automotive industry and agro-industries. With a favorable investment climate, an entrepreneurial spirit and an open society, Thailand has been chosen by many businesses, media firms, as well as international organizations and non-governmental organizations

International Relations

With a foreign policy of "Looking to the Future," Thailand has long adopted an outward-looking foreign policy and has sought to deepen and broaden its relations and cooperation with all countries within the bilateral, regional and multilateral frameworks. As an active and responsible member of the international community, Thailand participates fully in regional and international organizations. Thailand seeks to play a constructive role in international affairs and address the challenges faced by the global community. Currently, Thailand enjoys diplomatic relations with over 190 countries and maintains more than 90 embassies, consulates-general and diplomatic missions abroad. Most recently, Thailand opened an embassy in Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan in 2012. Thailand attaches great importance to the deepening and broadening of its relations and cooperation with neighboring countries, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Asia-Pacific region as a whole. At the same time, it seeks to further strengthen partnerships at all levels with strategic countries and trade partners around the world.

As a founding member of ASEAN, Thailand has been a major player in contributing to the progress of the organization as well as enhancing its role on the global stage. Thailand is a key driving force in the efforts toward an ASEAN Community by 2015 and will further strengthen regional and sub-

regional cooperation in a wide spectrum of issues. The kingdom is also committed to playing an active role in working to address these global challenges in various fora including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asian Summit (EAS), the Asia-Pacific Economic Community (APEC), and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).

Additionally, Thailand is a major proponent of ASEAN Connectivity and also supports regional and sub-regional integration. Through frameworks such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the Ayeyawady – Chao Phraya – Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS), the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) cooperation and the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI), Thailand has been promoting technical cooperation and capacity-building, sharing with its neighbors as well as other developing countries its experience and best practices in fields of its expertise. Such fields include agriculture, public health, tourism and education, as well as projects inspired by the various royal initiatives and concepts such as the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, crop substitution and the promotion of sustainable alternative livelihood.

Thailand is strongly committed to multilateralism under the United Nations (UN) as a pillar of its foreign policy and as the most effective approach to addressing global challenges. As one of the earliest members of the UN (since 1946), Thailand has actively worked in cooperation with all UN agencies in Thailand, Southeast Asia and other parts of the world.

Bangkok is the center for many regional offices of United Nations network organizations such as the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization and its Secretariat (SEAMEO).

In keeping with its international responsibilities, Thailand has played an active role in **peace keeping operations** in many parts of the world, such as in Timor Leste, Burundi and Darfur. Moreover, it sent a counter Piracy Task Force to join the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) in the Gulf of Aden during September-December 2010 and again during July-November 2011. Looking ahead, Thailand remains firmly committed to the maintenance and promotion of international security and has announced its candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations' Security Council for the term 2017-2018.

Thailand attaches importance to the issues of **piracy and maritime security**, as a littoral state of the Malacca Straits. Thailand has also been working closely with many countries to prevent **international terrorism** in all aspects and also recognizes the importance of dealing with the root causes of terrorism, including poverty, social injustice, religious intolerance, and the existence of regional and international conflicts.

Additionally, the kingdom has worked to foster international partnerships to attain the **UN Millennium Development Goals** as well as to tackle various development challenges from food security to climate change and from environmental degradation, infectious diseases to health concerns. Thailand is also active in area of **disaster prevention and management** and has a long-standing tradition of **humanitarian assistance**. It has provided aid to people affected by recent natural disasters in countries like Myanmar, Haiti, Indonesia, Pakistan, New Zealand and Japan.

Thailand recognizes the importance of interfaith dialogue and has sought to build bridges across different cultures and religions to draw strength from diversity. It is also firmly committed to **promoting human security and human rights**. Thailand is party to most international human rights instruments and seeks to play an active and constructive role in promoting human rights. Thailand was elected a member of the then United Nations

Commission on Human Rights from 2001 to 2003 and was elected a member of the Human Rights Council (HRC) for the years 2010-2012. It was also elected to a one-year term as President of the Council in 2010 and is seeking reelection to the Council for the term 2015-2017.

With a long history of openness and engagement, Thailand will continue to play an active role in promoting international partnerships and multilateral cooperation in order to build a world of peace, progress and prosperity for all.

Ref: Royal Thai Embassy, Washington D.C.