



# WELCOME TO THE LAND OF SMILES



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# Introduction

Choosing Thailand is choosing hot, sweaty jungles, juicy fruits, rich, sweet curries, ancient temples and exotic dances. It is crystal oceans, arctic malls, traffic jam, Muay Thai and the infamous smile.

Let's take this journey together this book will be your guide; through the depths of an exotic culture full of joy, disappointment, mystery, excitement, loneliness, and surprise.

In the end we hope you have a wonderful experiment together with AFS Thailand.

This guide will provide you with only the most essential things to know about the land of smiles.

Everything else is in your hands.

Make your own experiences, discover, explore and make mistakes!

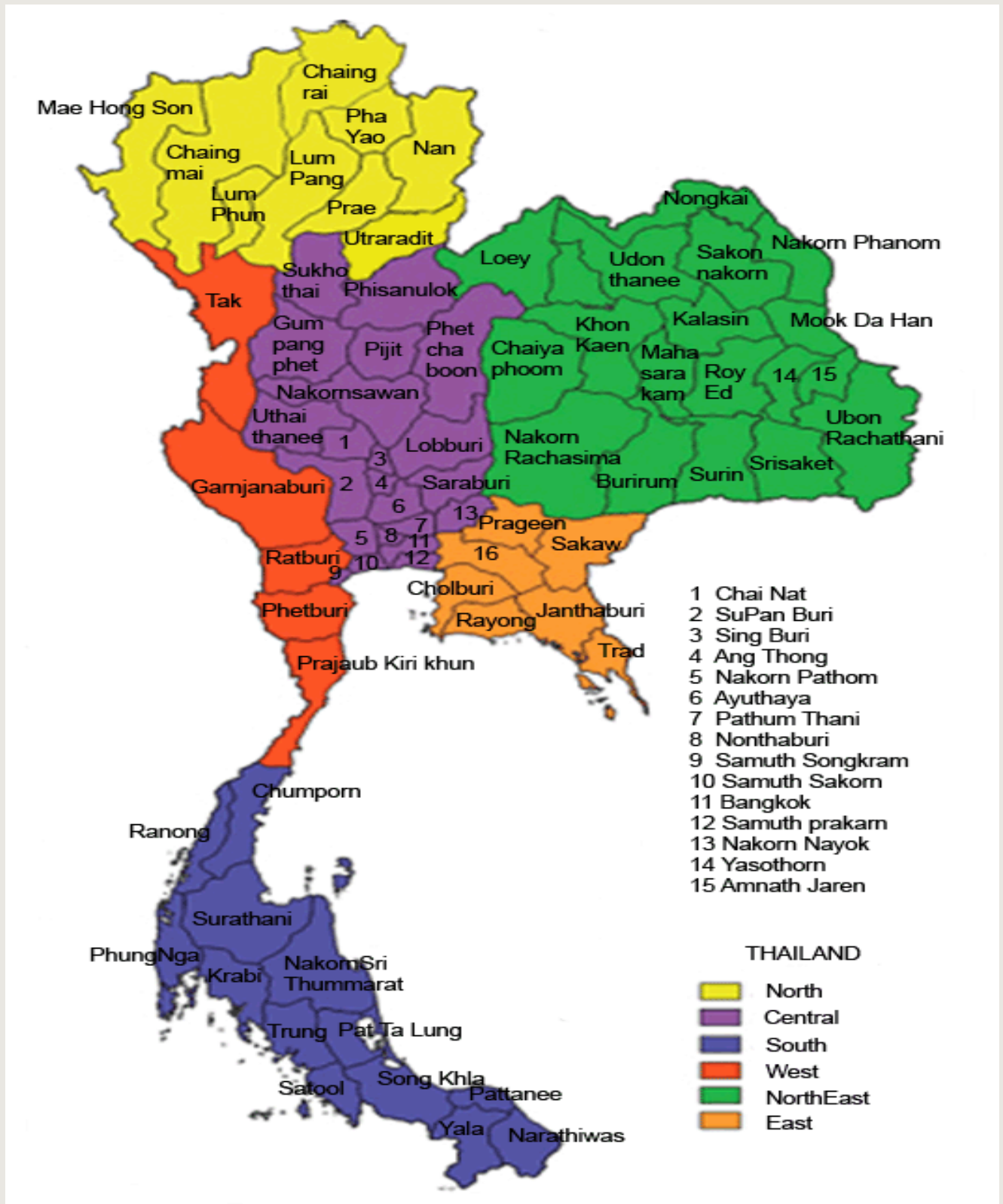
Learn a new language, pick up a sport, make friends and enjoy time together with your new family.

Now it is on YOU.

We wish you all the best on this journey.

May it be unforgettable!

# Map of Thailand



<http://www.raktamachat.org/info/directions/thailand-map/>

# General Information

To start up some general facts about Thailand you might not know yet!

Area	513,115 sq.kms
North – South	2,500km
East – West	1,250km
Coastline	2,795km
Number of Provinces	77
Highest Mountain	Doi Inthanon 2,576 m
Population	65 millions
Main Religion	Buddhism
Electricity supply	220 volts
Weights & Measurement	Metric
Time	GMT+7 hours
Driving	On the left side of road
Temples in Thailand	29,000+
Country code	+66
Capital	Bangkok
Currency	Thai Baht
Borders	Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Malaysia
Official language	Thai

Thailand is a kingdom in the center of South East Asia.

The country is divided into 77 provinces that can be combined to 6 geographical regions – North, Northeastern, East, West, Central and South which all reflect to specific culture, landscape and foods as well as habits of their respective provinces.



# Temperature

In Thailand the climate is generally tropical although different seasons bring change to an overall hot and humid weather.



Summer: Mid February – Mid May

Average temperature: 35-39°C, sometimes up to 40°C

Please make sure to drink enough during summer to prevent dehydration.

Rainy season: Mid May – Mid October

Average temperature: 26-33°C and sometimes up to 40°

You should prepare for rain every day and keep in mind that the weather can change quickly!

A sunny day doesn't mean that it is not going to rain.



Cold season : There is no winter season in Thailand but the weather gets colder from mid October – Mid February

Average temperature: 15-25°C and can get down to 8°C in the north and northeastern.

It will take time to get used to the weather. Sweating is nothing to be ashamed of. Usually your body will get used to the heat quickly.

Although the weather is quite warm please don't forget to carry a pullover to put on in the Malls, which are air-conditioned and therefore very cold.

## Regions



### The North:

The northern region borders Myanmar and Laos. It consists of 17 provinces with Chiang Mai being the most famous city. The landscape is mountainous, rich of forests and teak wood.

The climate is cooler than in other regions, especially in winter.



Northern economy is based on agriculture, tobacco, silk and mining. Affected by the cool weather people do and say things more slowly compared to other parts. Northern dialect (Kum Muang) is also considered the most polite and beautiful.

Food mostly comes with sticky rice and some kind of spicy dip. Famous for the north is crispy pork skin with a paste of grilled green chilies.

## **The Northeast:**



Being the biggest region of Thailand the northeast called Isaan contains 20 provinces. It borders Laos and Cambodia, which influences its culture and dialect.

People are rather easy going, but also more conservative and superstitious.

The landscape is mostly flat with some rivers and craters. There skeletons of dinosaurs have been found.

Agriculture such as rice and crops make up the biggest part of the economy. However, Isaan is also famous for its hand woven silk.

The northeast has its own dialect called Isaan, which is connected to Laos.

Isaan hosts more festivals such as Elephant festival, Boon Bung Fai festival and Phi Ta Khone festival, which other regions don't have.

The most famous northeastern dish is called "Som Tum". It is a papaya salad available in many variations eaten with sticky rice.





## **The East:**



There are 7 provinces in the region. The geography is characterized by short mountain ranges and short rivers which drain into the Gulf of Thailand. People in these areas grow several kinds of fruits which plays the major of the region industry just like coastlines and industrial areas.

## **Central:**



26 provinces make up central, which lies in the heart of Thailand. It's landscape is plain and lanced by many rivers.

Due to the flat land rice growing and fruit farms are an important part of the economy. However, the biggest part is the industry and tourism especially in the capital Bangkok.

People here speak standard Thai, which you can also hear on TV, radio and school. Many also understand English and other western languages.

Especially Bangkok area is quite crowded since good jobs and universities attract many. Families are often smaller and often people live in condominiums or small flats.

Central food is very popular and you can find it in any region in Thailand. Pad Thai, a fried noodle dish with peanuts is especially popular.





## **The West**

This region is the smallest one which sometimes is included in the central. There are 4 provinces. The area is starting from the long mountainous

areas of Myanmar border toward the southern coastline. Water and mineral are the most important resources as there are several dams. The beaches – Huahin and Cha-am toward the southern province are also very famous among tourist.



## **The South:**



The south of Thailand is surrounded by the Gulf of Thailand on in the east, the Andaman Sea in the west and Malaysia in the south.

It can be divided into 14 provinces with many beautiful islands such as Pa Ngan, Samui, Tarutao, Lipe, etc.

Geographically it is quite polarizing with high mountains and flat coasts.

Especially the weather is different with many tropical monsoons bringing lots of rain and no winter.

Economically fishing, tourism, rubber and palm products are important.

Due to the hot climate the people have a faster lifestyle and dialect.

Because of the many palm trees in the south a lot of dishes include coconut milk such as the sweet “massaman curry” with peanuts.

As you can imagine seafood is also quite common and very delicious since it is fresh from the ocean.



## City vs. Countryside



There are two areas where students will be placed.

Shopping malls, movie theatres and traffic jam define Thailand's cities. There is a lot to see and to discover. Many varieties of food, clothes and entertainment make big cities such as Bangkok more expensive and therefore, you generally need more money.

Traffic and pollution are also downsides of masses of cars and people. Still public transportation is well established and it is easy to get anywhere even without a car.

On the other hand the countryside is quiet and usually has limited public transportation. People often do not speak English, but tend to be more welcoming and warmhearted.

Students here tend to learn Thai faster and dig much deeper into Thai culture, since the countryside values tradition much more than the city folk.

Most students will be placed in the countryside. But don't think that you will have a boring year, just because you may not stay in Bangkok.

If you are placed in a rural part be proud of it!

For you will experience a different Thailand full of traditions, festivals and caring people.

And don't worry everyone will have a chance to experience both sides!







## Thai Monarchy

As you may know Thailand is a constitutional Monarchy.

That means the king although the head of state does not have any

political influence.

But still king Bhumibol Adulyadej is respected throughout Thailand and he is a symbol of the country. During his long reign he initiated many projects to help his people, especially those in the countryside.

Because he is too old now to be able to take care of those his children carry on his vision of a better, more prosperous Thailand.

To show their respect and their appreciation many pictures of the royal family can be seen throughout the country.

The topic of the royal family is very sensitive and many Thai people will not tolerate criticism on behalf of the monarchy or any of its members.

We advise you not to mention the subject until you feel comfortable enough in your family. Please also try don't disrespect any object that can be connected to the monarchy.

There are laws prohibiting people from such actions and a jail sentence can be a consequence of disrespecting the king.

## Religion



94% of Thai people are Buddhists. This influence can be seen in many Thai habits and customs and also is an important factor of Thai culture. Throughout Thailand you can see many temples and statues of Buddha.

Besides Buddhism there are minorities such as Christians and Muslims. Especially in the south Islam is more dominant since Malaysian culture influenced the region.

## Economy

Thailand is rich in agriculture such as rice and a variety of fruits. Together with rubber and palm products they make up a great part of Thai economy.

As the country is becoming the most important automobile supplier in South East Asia, the industry is growing to become the most important business branch.

Since Thailand produces many of its day-to-day necessities, things like food and drinks are very cheap. However, imported goods such as electronic devices can be quite expensive.

## Currency

The Thai currency is based on Baht and satang. The highest note (1000 baht) corresponds to about 25 Euro (2015). Still many vendors don't accept it. That's why we recommend changing it or buying something inexpensive at a convenient store to break it down. If you want to buy something expensive we recommend paying by credit or debit card.

Coins	Notes
25 satang	10 baht (brown) (Not in common usage)
50 satang	20 baht (green)
1 baht	50 baht (blue)
2 baht	100 baht (red)
5 baht	500 baht (purple)
10 baht	1000 baht (grey)



**NOTE:** The King's face is on all form of currency! Stepping on it, burning it or insulting it in any other way is taken very seriously in Thailand and can result in arrest or a big fine as well as a lawsuit!



## Language & Alphabet

The official language of Thailand is Thai or Central Thai. It is a member of the Tai-Kadai language family like for example Chinese. As a tonal language it might be hard to get used to for westerners, because the meaning of a word can change depending on the tone. There is high, low, mid, rising and falling.

Don't worry this might sound difficult, but once you are in Thailand you will get used to the sound.

The Thai alphabet consists of 44 consonant letters, 15 vowel symbols that combine into at least 28 vowel forms, and four tone diacritics.

พยัญชนะไทย			
ก ก ไก่	ข ข ไข่	ช ช ชวด	ค ค ควาย
ค ค คน	ฃ ฃ ระฆัง	ง ง งู	จ จ จาน
ฉ ฉ ฉิ่ง	ช ช ช้าง	ซ ซ โซ่	ณ ณ เณร
ญ ญ หญิง	ฎ ฎ ขฎา	ฏ ฏ ปฏัก	จ จ ฐาน

Consonants are written horizontally from left to right, with vowels arranged above, below, to the left, or to the right of the corresponding consonant, or in a combination of positions.

You will probably learn how to write in school. However, please note that written Thai often uses rather polite and elegant words not common in spoken Thai. That makes it hard to learn how to read. Still it will be helpful reading menus, prices and information boards.

## Food

Thailand enjoys a vast variety of food due to great local supply of many ingredients.

Food is mostly served in bite-sized portions and placed in the middle of the table. There are often three or more kinds of different food you can choose from.

Those are for everyone and they usually come with a spoon you can use to put the food onto your plate. Please don't eat the food directly from the middle of the table. Besides that, everyone has a serve of rice or noodles depending on the food served.



Thai people are often eating three warm meals a day. Not all families eat typical Thai food, but especially in rural areas most families will.

Especially in Bangkok area people tend to buy food from street vendors. This is often easier and less expensive than cooking at home. You will easily find a whole meal for one to two euro.

You probably have hear that the Thai kitchen is very spicy.

That is definitely true for some dishes like Som Tum (papaya salad) and a lot of southern food. But generally it is possible to order any dish without chili or spicy pepper. Just say “mai sai prik” or “mai paed”, which means not spicy.

Besides hot food there are also sweet, sour and salty dishes depending on the ingredients.

In most restaurants or street vendors you will be able to spice up your dish with herbs, sugar, chili and fish sauce. That way



you can always decide the flavor of your food yourself. But we recommend trying some spicy dishes as well. Don't worry you will get used to it!



Usually when eating with your family the oldest person will start and everyone else just joins in. There is no kind of wishing (e.g. itadakimasu, Guten Appetit or Bon Apetit) before starting to eat.

During dinner or any other meal people mostly don't talk and certainly not discuss i.e. political issues. If your host family is into discussing there will be time for that before or after, but usually not during meals.

## **Water**

Though tap water is treated and safe to drink, most Thais usually drink filtered water. Host families provide bottled, boiled, or filtered water. Please check with your family, which option applies to you.

## **Cellphone & Internet connection**

Staying in contact with your family and friends is very important in Thailand. Young or old everyone has a (smart-) phone or tablet to chat, tweet, post or upload what they are doing right now. Instead of the messenger "what's app" Thais prefer "Line", which is basically the same.

To be able to connect to the internet anywhere at any time there is a broad network system. Unfortunately not all host families in rural areas will have internet access or if they do it mostly won't be as fast. In that case you can use school computers to connect with your family and friends.

Eventhough you see people in the family are obsess with the cellphone use but it doesn't mean that you should follow them. You are here to interact to people so that try to spen time talking with the host family and its members to integrate to the family as well as create family like atmostphere.



# Living as a Thai

## Communication



## Greetings

Thai people greet each other not by shaking hands, but by “wai”. This is a prayer like gesture with a slight bow. The higher the hands the more respect is being expressed. In Thailand older people get more respect as well as parents, teacher. The highest position of the hands is reserved for monks and the king. People *wai* the first time they see each other and the last time of the

day. The younger one or with lower social status will begin and the other one will return it.

Some people will try to give you a handshake. Please don't return it too strong. Most Thai people do not know what a firm handshake is and will be surprised by your strength. Please adapt to them.

Hugging is not common in Thailand even between friends. Your host family may hug you, but it may take time for them to open up to you and eventually it depends on the host family.

## Style

Thais often communicate indirect especially when talking about uncomfortable topics or when facing problems.

Often Thai people will use “maybe” or “some people” to make their opinions less forceful.

Example: “Do you think Thailand is a great country?”

“Some people say it is rich in culture and full of joy.”

This way they don't express their personal opinion directly, but suggest that "some people" might think so. Not necessarily themselves.

Please also try to pay attention to the behavior of the people around you. A change in the way someone treats you (i.e. lack of respect or no/less communication) might be a hint that something is not going well. In that case you should ask a third party person that knows both of you. He or she might be able to help you.



## Emotions

In Thailand you will notice that hardly anyone shows sadness, anger or other negative emotions. Of course they can be angry or sad, but adults will always try to conceal them.



In Thai culture people believe the expression of negative emotions makes other people uncomfortable, which is why it is equal to losing your face.

We know it is hard for you to cover your emotions, since your culture probably encourages you to show them. However, if you are angry or sad Thai people will most likely not understand you and worry, even if it is just something minor.

## Conflicts

If you ever have a conflict with a member of your host family or anyone at school you should try to solve it! Thais don't always do that and instead just keep smiling and pretending everything is fine. Eventually everything will work out.

However, this takes some time and we are sure you don't want to spend half of your exchange experience not talking to someone while the conflict might even get worse.

Often it is about little things connected to communication or something you did unintentionally.



In western culture you would just talk to the person straight on. That is not the case in Thailand. If you want to change things try to point out positive ways to change the situation, don't criticize someone directly.

If that doesn't work try to talk to a third party mediator who can help to solve the issue, getting the third party involve is also to avoid the emotional expression that may cause the losing face of the other.

It may sound sneaky to talk to someone who is not a part of the problem, but we made the experience that it usually works this way.

That is the reason why schools and host families often contact us instead of you. It makes them more comfortable since it is not easy for them handling uncomfortable situations directly.

In the end of a conflict you will probably hear the term "kho-thot" very often. It is a term used to apologize when things go wrong. Many people use it even if they did not make a mistake. Often they try to avoid any conflict or to smooth the situation.

## **Mai Bhen Rai**

This is one of the most important words you will hear. Literally it means "never mind" and it can somewhat describe Thai attitude very well. If something unpleasant is happening, for example you made a mistake the other one mostly says "mai bpen rai" in order to calm the situation and avoid confrontation. It will cover conflicts and disputes, but don't think that Thai people don't care! They do, but they don't want to lose their temper and have an argument in public. They use the term to brush uncomfortable situations away. Often people really don't mind, but apologizing is still important to show the other one that you are eager to resolve the issue.



## **Yes and No**

Sometimes Thai people will tell you what you want to hear instead of what they think.

This might be due to the fact that you are older than them or that they don't want to hurt you. In general people will not really say "no" to an older person, but try being considerate and get around it somehow.

This might confuse you in the beginning since you might get promised a lot, but not what you have asked for. This goes a long with a lot of parents telling their children "maybe" instead of "no". For example when you want to go out and they will tell you that it is "maybe" ok to go it usually means "no". If you notice your parents being hesitant about something try talking to a third party person who might understand your situation or who can act as a mediator such as siblings.

On the other hand "Yes" does not always mean "yes" as well. Sometimes it just means that they have heard you, not even that they have understood what you mean.

Please also mind that Thai people are not really used to holding back and forth discussion especially not with older people. Asking "why" something is like it is a lot will mostly not make you more popular. Try to find out if this applies to your host family or not by starting small discussions you can easily stop when you notice that they dislike them. This is since many Thai people see discussing as questioning which is especially rude if it is a teacher or an elder person.

## **Kreng Jai**

Connected to Buddhist belief it is the thinking that others should be thought about first.

A Thai will always try to think of others before themselves since it is an essential part of their belief. Thinking of yourself first would be very impolite and therefore not considerate.

Just try to share your food with others or even your time. Ask others if they need help with anything and support your friends. Little things will sum up and make people think you are a caring person, which is what kreng jai really is about.

It is also part of kreng jai that Thais don't always tell you when they have a problem with you. Sometimes they will talk to AFS staff instead of you. You might not feel treated fairly, but they just don't want to be inconsiderate.

We understand that in many cultures this is seen as being dishonest or backstabbing. However, in Thailand criticism is more often expressed through a third person that acts as a mediator.

## **The Middle Way**

Rooting in Buddhism is a Thai belief called the “middle way”. It describes the belief that nothing should be (expressed) “too negative” or “too positive”.



Sometimes it might seem that Thai people are not very passionate about what they are doing. However, this is part of the middle way.

When you are being emotional try not to show it too much since Thais might not understand you. They might think you are very upset when you really are not since they are not used to extreme (mostly negative) emotions. Thai people will hide their emotions to keep up the middle way one of the most important parts of Thai culture.

## **Use of social media**

In Thailand you might notice that family, friends and school mates upload pictures of you on social platforms without your knowledge.

That is a big part of Thai lifestyle. Many people upload pictures on facebook or instagram on a daily basis.

Please talk to the concerning person if you wish those pictures to be taken off the internet. However, please be considerate and understand that those people did not do that because they wanted to harm you, but because it is a part of their culture.

In the past many exchange students uploaded questionable pictures themselves.

Please understand that in Thai culture it is not acceptable to upload pictures that might harm your image (i.e. pictures with cigarettes, a lot of money (gangster style), drunk, or pretending to be any of those).



People will talk about you and in Thai culture your behavior always reflects bad on your families image as well!

## Hierarchy

### System

Hierarchy is a very important part of Thai society. It can be found in many small habits and it is important to understand it.

### Head to Toe

For Thai people the head is the most sacred part of the body. The soul is believed to sit in it and it is not to be touched by anyone without permission.

On the other hand the feet represent the lowest and therefor dirtiest part of the body.

Try not to point your feet at other people and do not touch your feet with your hands when other people are in the same room.



## **Person**

Even in different people and interactions Hierarchy is present.

In Thai society old people are higher in status and will be getting more respect than others.

Usually people don't question them much and don't say "no", but try to find other ways to tell them that something is not possible.

On the other hand people of high social status such as wealthy or famous people will often receive privileges and better treatment.

Highest in respect are members of the royal family and monks.

Thais will not question them or talk bad about them in any way. Therefore, criticism on religion and monarchy is not taken lightly.

There are many ceremonies and festivals during the year where you will be able to witness the high position of religion and monarchy.

## **Things**

Even objects can be a part of hierarchy in Thailand. A pillow for your head for example shouldn't be used for your butt. Educational books shouldn't be put on the floor, since you learn from them and therefore, should treat them with respect. In some families underwear is being washed and dried separately.

There are many more examples, but it is impossible to name them all here. Just try to keep an open eye and look out when people do things differently. If you are uncertain just ask. People will help you and understand if you make a mistake.

## **Privacy**

In western culture people are seen as individuals with individual needs, wants and rights.

In Thailand people tend to see themselves as part of a group and therefore privacy is not always valued as much as in the west.



It might happen that your host brother or parents enter your room without knocking or even when you are not at home.

Some families will also have security cameras in their houses in order to assure security and keep other people from breaking in.

If your host family should interfere with your personal privacy please talk to them and explain why you feel that way, because they might not understand it.

## **Values and Space between genders**

Many Thai parents don't allow their children to have friends of the opposite sex. Usually they will stay apart and not interact too much with each other besides in school. Even holding hands with a girlfriend is not normal for traditional Thai people.



Especially sex is not common between people of your age. Please consider the pressure you put on a girl/boy when their family or village finds out about it.

Parents and the whole family will get blamed for not prohibiting it. Teenage pregnancies are not approved by Thai society so even if you should come to have sex with a Thai especially girls please notice that teenage pregnancy especially without prior marriage is not appropriate.

In case it is unavoidable please make sure to protect yourself and partner from pregnancy and diseases, using condom is strongly recommended.

Conservative Thais strongly believe in sex after marriage especially in the parents' point of view, but some will start having sex after university when they got a job and are independent from their families!

# **AFS**

## **AFS Mission Statement**

AFS is an international, voluntary, non-governmental, non-profit organization that provides intercultural learning opportunities to help people develop the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to create a more peaceful world.

## **Core Values and Attributes of AFS**

AFS enables people to act as responsible, global citizens working for peace and understanding in a diverse world. It acknowledges that peace is a dynamic concept threatened by injustice, inequity, and intolerance.

AFS seeks to affirm faith in the dignity and worth of every human being and for all nations and cultures. It encourages respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race, sex, languages, religions, or social status.

AFS activities are based on our core values of dignity, respect for differences, harmony, sensitivity, and tolerance.

## **Hosting Mission**

Our aim is to provide all participants with a quality experience leading to intercultural understanding and personal growth. In order to provide learning opportunities, we shall continually seek to improve the quality of our services provided through evaluation and change.

All participants have the right to be listened to, to feel free and confident to contact any staff member and expect that that person will be able to help them with their concerns. Staff shall provide our participants with courteous and timely service. In line with AFS policies, we give 24 hours emergency support. Emergency contact

telephone numbers are given to you during arrival orientation and at periodic times during your programs. We provide structured and unstructured learning and encourage all students to make use of these opportunities.

What is AFS Thailand?

- It is well known as a prestigious organization
- It is registered as a non-profit foundation
- It has 17 hosting centers providing support to all hosting programs
- It has 80 chapters supporting sending programs

Hosting centers and chapters are made up of volunteers: usually teachers and administrators at local schools, and parents or returnees who assist the National Office in all aspects of AFS Programs. All of these people are volunteers; they are not paid for their time. They do it because they enjoy working for and believe in the AFS mission.

The AFS National Office is located in Nonthaburi (a province adjacent to Bangkok, part of Bangkok Metropolis). Its task is to give leadership to the volunteers and to take final responsibility for all AFS programs and participants. Its job is also to communicate and work with other AFS offices around the world.

## **Your AFS experience**

We expect that you will see many different situations and meet all kinds of people. As you involve yourself in your new life in Thailand, we hope that you will gain new insights into yourself, your own country, your hosting community and others.

The key to a more peaceful world is communication and understanding, and during your time in Thailand you will have the opportunity to learn through personal experience what these words really mean.

## **AFS Rules**

Before leaving home you signed a participation agreement with important rules explained below: (For ALL programs except Educator and Volunteer programs)

### **No driving**

You will not drive a car or other motorized vehicle. Failure to comply is a cause for early return (ER) to your home country.

### **No drugs**

You are forbidden to use drugs not prescribed for medical purposes.

### **Thai laws**

All AFS participants must obey the laws of Thailand. AFS Thailand cannot protect you if you disobey any laws.

### **Participants travel policy**

While on the program and in Thailand, participants must adhere to the travel guidelines of AFS Thailand and obtain approval for independent travel from the National Office prior to formulating plans.

### **The travel guidelines to which you must adhere while in Thailand are:**

1. AFS participants in Thailand are forbidden to hitchhike.
2. If you travel with your host family or on school trips, you will need to give details to your AFS contact person and national office. If the trip is more than 3 days, you must give details to the national office well in advance and obtain approval prior to travel.
3. You may not arrange travel by requesting hospitality from AFS contacts, AFS Hosting Centers or Chapters, fellow students etc.
4. You may not interrupt attendance at AFS compulsory events or school/work site for travel purpose.

5. AFS discourages and will not take responsibility for you if you travel alone, with your natural family or friends from home, with a non-AFS or non-school group.

All school based program - We do not allow school based programs to travel independently during the program in Thailand unless you travel with your host family, school, contact person or natural family from home.

For 18+ participants - You are allowed to do independent travel during school holiday and with the permission of the CPO (worksite) and host family.

If your ambition for coming to Thailand is to travel and see as much of Thailand as you can, be a tourist, not an AFS participant.

AFS is an educational and cultural exchange organization, not a travel organization!

## **Visits of Family and Friends during the Experience**

Because visits from relatives and friends from the home country can often have a disruptive impact on the participant and hosts, AFS discourages visits from relatives and friends during the program. Relatives and friends will not visit unless they have obtained prior consent from both the local AFS and AFS Thailand National Office's officials.

Come to Thailand and plan to make the most of living as a family member and go to school (or work or organized program if you are on a different AFS program). The true value of AFS are people not places.



## Early Return (ER)

Based on the AFS participation Agreement signed by you and your natural family, there are 5 reasons why AFS may decide an Early Return (before the program has been completed)

1. Driving
2. Drugs
3. Abuse of alcohol
4. Medical
5. Non-adjustment



## Other AFS Thailand Policies (School based program)

### 1. School

- All students on YP, SM, IP programs must regularly attend school and assigned classes, school uniform is compulsory
- Males must be clean shaven – no moustaches or beards
- It is not acceptable for males or females to have their hair shaved, except when becoming a Buddhist monk or nun
- No smoking, no alcohol
- No dreadlocks or obviously-dyed hair
- No tattoo
- Adhere to school's rules and regulations.

### 2. Smoking

Thailand is becoming increasingly aware of the dangers of smoking and the government has enacted laws to prevent smoking in many public places. If you smoke, ask permission when in someone's house - refrain if asked.

Host family placement is done on the basis of the information you provide us – as non-smoker, so don't disappoint your host family by becoming a smoker.

Most Thai families do not accept smokers. It is difficult to find a host family for a smoker.

Smoking is not allowed at school or while wearing school uniform.

Thai people do not like to see girls smoking and most families would find this unacceptable. In fact, it isn't acceptable for any teenager to be seen smoking, anywhere!

### 3. Alcohol

Thai parents and Thai society do not accept children drinking alcohol. Alcohol is not allowed at school or at any AFS organized activity. Abuse of alcohol can be cause for an early return.

### 4. Activities – All Programs

All participants are expected to participate in all scheduled activities according to their program

# Thai School



The education system in Thailand requires twelve years to qualify for college and university.

Six years of elementary school and six years of secondary course are required. The school may have approximately 800 – 4,000 students depending on the city and school area. Students in each level are divided into classes (30-50 students per class/room); such as M.5/4 referring to Matthayom (year) 5 Room 4.

All school-based participants will be placed in the secondary school, but the level depends on your age, subjects and language scores (English program).

The stages and terms in Thai secondary school:

Stage	Grade	Thai Level	Age
<b>Lower Secondary</b>	7	Matthayom 1	12
	8	Matthayom 2	13
	9	Matthayom 3	14
<b>Higher Secondary</b>	10	Matthayom 4	15
	11	Matthayom 5	16
	12	Matthayom 6	17

The academic year is divided to two semesters, and there is a one month break between them.

Semester	Months
<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	May – October
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	November – March

## School Types

There are many types of schools in Thailand, but the participants will be mainly placed in the government or demonstration schools.

The students of the secondary level are usually in different programs depending on their interests. Many schools offer an English program (EP), which provides several

courses in English mixed with some Thai classes (only the participants who apply for the English program can join the EP classes).

## Study programs

Many schools provide different programs according to their interests.

Program	Description
<b>Science Program</b>	Focuses on Science subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Mathematics.
<b>Mathematic Program</b>	Focus on Mathematics and sometimes English
<b>Social Study Program</b>	Focuses on social studies such as history, politics, government, economics and religion
<b>Third Language Study Program</b>	Students can study a third language and also learn about its culture: French, German, Chinese and Japanese. Some schools may offer Spanish, Korean and Malay.

Differences between English program and normal Thai program

English Program	Normal Thai Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High admission fee (1,000-3,000 EUR)</li> <li>• 25-30 students per class</li> <li>• Classes mostly taught in English</li> <li>• Better facilities (air-conditioning, visual aids, projector, internet, etc.)</li> <li>• Extra activities such as school trips, which are already included in the fee.</li> <li>• Textbook: imported</li> </ul> <p>*Listed items depend on school policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No admission fee</li> <li>• 30-50 students per class</li> <li>• Classes taught in Thai</li> <li>• regular facilities (depends on school budget)</li> <li>• Limit activities</li> <li>• Textbooks (depends on school budget)</li> <li>• Need to pay for extra classes or activities</li> </ul>

## Types of English program

Types	Description
<b>English Program (EP)</b>	4-7 subjects will be taught in English (mostly language program, mathematic program and some science program)
<b>Mini English Program (MEP)</b>	3-5 subjects will be taught in English (mostly language program, mathematic program and some science program)
<b>Intensive English Program (IEP)</b>	2-5 subjects will be taught in English (mostly English language skills)
<b>Gifted Program (Gifted)</b>	1-3 subjects will be taught in English (mostly English language skills)

## School routine, classes and timetable

School mostly starts around 7:30 with school assembly. There teachers and students sing the national anthem (raising the flag), pray and listen to teacher's/director's announcements.

Your timetable will include 7-8 periods per day, 50 minutes each. Students have to walk from class to class following their timetable. You may have some free hours or homeroom hours for self-study; Thais will spend this free hour in the library for working on their assignments or seeing the class adviser.



The school is likely to be finished at 15:30 or 16:00. You have to stay in school even if your classes finish before.

Please note that as an exchange student you cannot graduate or get a diploma from a Thai school. However, you can get a transcript and a certificate of attendance in the end of your stay. Please understand that you need to participate 80% of all classes and respect all school rules in order to get a transcript.



## School rules in general

- Wear your school uniform properly every day. The sport uniform is only accepted if that day includes gym class.
- Do not wear any accessory such as rings, bracelets/bangles, fashionable necklaces or fashionable earrings
- Tattoos, make up, or unnatural dyed hair are not allowed
- Attend school and classes at least 80% of the time and be punctual
- Do not leave the school during the school day, usually 07:30-16:00
- Join the morning assembly every day
- Pay respect to all teachers and directors, “wai” when you first see them on that day and lower your head when you must walk past them.

## School uniform

The dress code for male student is likely to stay the same between lower and higher secondary level. However, for girls the uniforms usually change.

Male student:



<b>Hair:</b>	short hair only
<b>Shirt:</b>	white, open collar shirt, short sleeved
<b>Belt:</b>	black or dark brown with school symbol
<b>Short:</b>	knee- length shorts (the color depends on school policy, either dark blue, black or khaki)
<b>Socks:</b>	white socks (or brown socks if you wear khaki short)
<b>Shoes:</b>	black school shoes (or brown shoes if you wear khaki shorts)
<b>Bags:</b>	school bags only

### Female student:

<b>Hair:</b>	long hair must be tied back with a ribbon or bow (the color depends on school policy, either dark blue, black, brown or white)
<b>Shirt:</b>	a white, open collar shirt with twist, short sleeved
<b>Belt:</b>	black or dark brown color, with a school symbol
<b>Skirt:</b>	a knee- length skirt (the color depends on school policy, either dark blue or black)
<b>Socks:</b>	white socks
<b>Shoes:</b>	black school shoes
<b>Bags:</b>	school bags only

The Sport uniform is the same for both male and female students and contains the school colors, which makes it unique for each school. Please note that you can wear the sport uniform only the day that you have the physical education class on your timetable.

There are some other uniforms that you may see such as a scout uniform or a ceremony suite.

## School activities

Thai school does not have many activities throughout the academic year as most student focus on exams. Many even have extra classes after school or go to summer school.

However, many school still offer cultural classes such as cooking, dancing, Muay Thai (martial art), food carving or Thai music.

The biggest event for Thai students is sport days which take around two weeks for competitions, and another 1-2 days of the final round and the opening-closing ceremony (you will get a chance to dress in Thai costume for the parade).



The school may offer domestic school trips (or abroad for the English program), the expenses will be announced by the school as you may have to pay extra if you want to join.

English camps are also a great experience for all participants. They are either organized by your host school or another school may ask you to join. Please be prepared to share your skills or experience on energizers or entertainment. If you are of help to the camp staff, they will invite/recommend you to join many camps.

## Speeches

You may be asked to give many speeches during your AFS experience. The speeches you give will help members of your community learn more about you, your country, and about AFS.

Many people want to learn about your AFS experience and what it's like to live in Thailand. Giving a speech can be fun and a way of meeting new people and sharing ideas and information.

You probably need to give a speech on your first day at school - It should only be a short speech- your name, where you are from, how old you are and how excited you are to be at the school.

You may be asked to speak at a Rotary or other Service Club or any groups in the community. Your school advisor will help schedule your speeches - you should ask for their help before accepting or refusing a speaking engagement.



## Friendships



For some students it is not very easy to make friends at school. Many Thais don't have a lot of friends, but a selected group. Even then many students don't have time to meet since they need to study for school or entrance exams.

It might take you a while to make friends. Since you most likely will stand out many students will already know about you. Use that advantage to make contact and build on that.

# Host family

Host families in Thailand can be of any social class. Often teachers decide to host a student and you will go to the school they are teaching at.

A traditional family consists of the parents, grandparents and children, but there are also single mums and dads with or without children that want to host as well as families without grandparents, especially in the cities. However, most host families are traditional and you will most likely have a host brother or sister.

Some families already have a lot of experience in hosting a participant. They know what you are going through and how confusing it can be in the beginning.

Please understand that not all host families will be able to communicate with you in English. But don't worry no participant ever failed to communicate with their families and a family that can't speak English often is a great opportunity to learn Thai faster.

**Families in Thailand do NOT get paid for hosting you. There are lots of reasons for a family to host a foreigner. Here are some examples:**

- Mostly they want to experience a different culture and teach you their own.
- Sometimes they want to host a student for their children to improve their English.
- It is seen as prestigious and honorable to host an exchange student especially in rural areas. You might be their way to show off.
- Sometimes their children are already at university or moved out and they want to offer that free space to a student.

There are many more and no matter why your host family hosts you, they are certainly excited about you and can't wait to see you!





## **Siblings**

As mentioned you will probably have siblings in your host family. Those can be of any age. Younger siblings 5 or 6 years old is not unusual.

Parents often spoil them since they know that later life is going to be a lot harder. When Thai children get into school the hard work starts. They study a lot after school and don't do a lot else besides academics in order to get in to good colleges, which makes it easier to get a great job and make money.

This is why their family will want them to get as good grades as possible. That's also the reason why your brothers or sisters may not have a lot of time for you especially on weekdays. Therefore the time before you make own friends can be lonely!

## **For a healthy family life please mind:**

- You should always ask for permission if you want to go anywhere (text message or call if no one is at home) and call if you are running late on an appointment/curfew
- Do not be too picky about food. Try to eat what your family eats. Sometimes you may ask for something special, but it should not be too often. You can also buy/prepare your own food (food is really inexpensive in Thailand)
- Try to be of help. You will be a part of the family, in some cases that also includes family duties.
- Do not expect your host family to take you to places. For some the financial burden will be too much.
- Try to keep your room as clean as possible. Even if your host siblings might not do so. It will keep insects away and make your host family happy.

## **Questions for the first days with your new host family**

1. What do I call you? Mum, Dad or.....?

2. What am I expected to do daily other than...?
  - ... Make my bed
  - ... Keep my room tidy
  - ... keep the bathroom clean when I use it
3. What is the procedure for dirty clothes? Where do I keep them until wash day?
4. Should I wash my own clothes?
5. What is the procedure for ironing clothes?
6. May I use the iron, washing machine?
7. Where can I keep my toiletries?
8. When is the best time for me to use the bathroom on weekday mornings?
9. When are meal times?
10. Do I have a permanent duty at mealtimes?
  - ... Set the table, clean the table, wash up, dry up, and put everything away after the meal, empty the trash, etc.?
11. May I help myself to food and drinks (non-alcoholic) at any time or must I ask first?
12. May I smoke? Where can I smoke?
13. Which areas are strictly private?
14. May I put pictures or posters in my bedroom?
15. Where can I store my suitcase?
16. What time must I get up on weekday mornings?
17. What time must I get up on weekends or holidays?
18. What time must I go to bed on weeknights?
19. Do I have to ask if I want to go out?
20. What time must I be in at night? Can exceptions be made for special occasions?
21. Can I have friends to stay overnight?
22. Can I invite friends of both sexes over during the day?

23. What are the rules about local phone calls?
24. May my friends call me?
25. What are the rules on overseas phone calls?
26. What are the rules on collect calls?
27. What is the procedure for posting letters?
28. Do family members have any dislikes or hates? (Chewing gum, loud music, smoking, punctuality, people interrupting etc...)
29. How do I get around? Is there a bus route? Do I get a bicycle?
30. How do I get to school?
31. What are the rules on transportation?
32. May I use the stereo or television?
33. How often does the family go to church/temple? Am I expected to go?
34. Do you expect me to call/text message if I am going to be 10, 20 or 30 minutes late?

# Preparations

## Gifts

A present is a wonderful way to say thank you! It needs no translation and is universal in every culture.

Don't worry it doesn't need to be something big. We recommend getting something small for everyone instead of one big expensive present for the whole family. Getting a personal gift is just different and unique presents are often more appreciated.

The moment you get your family information from us you will know more about their hobbies and can start figuring out a gift for them.



In Thailand the wrapping is sometimes even more important than the present itself.

Please don't be disappointed if your family won't open their presents right away. This is not an expression of impoliteness, but the opposite. In Thailand it is considered rude to open a gift in front of the giver, because if one doesn't like it they might not be able to control their emotions.

## Useful things

On arrival, you will have to present your own country. Slides or pictures are always a great idea. You may be asked to do a bulletin board at school (YP & SM only).

Therefore, recommend bringing some items that will help you explain your home country and culture:

- Photographs of your home and family
- A map of your country
- Posters
- National flag
- National costume



- Postcards
- Recipes
- Pamphlets and picture books
- Power Point Presentation
- Coins and notes

## **Clothes**

Please keep in mind that Thailand is a tropical, hot country. Thick jackets are not recommended as well as many long-sleeved shirts.

However, please mind that tank tops and spaghetti tops are not seen as polite clothing and therefore not appropriate. In any case your shoulders should be covered.

Bring a couple of T-shirts and shorts (covering knees). One or two formal outfits are recommended. But don't bring too many clothes since Thai fashion might be different and you probably want to adapt to it and clothes in general are fairly cheap in Thailand.

Slippers or sandals are perfect, since you will probably have to slip in and out quickly and in the hot weather they are more comfortable than closed ones.

You will not see many people wearing jeans like in Europe or the US. Here they are for casual wear only.



If you are going to live in a region close to the beach you might consider bringing a swimsuit/pants. Bikinis for girls might be showing too much skin (check with your host family). Thai girls will often wear short pants and a T-shirt to protect their skin. For guys bathing pants are fine.

Please don't forget to bring your own towel(s) since those are a part of personal items and your host family will probably not provide them for you. Every family member has his or her own towel.

If you want to save space and weight in your luggage you can buy some personal items here. Sometimes your host family might provide them for you, but don't expect it.

## **What will you need to pay for?**

As mentioned you may need to pay for your own personal items such as Shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrush, toiletries, souvenirs, snacks, drinks and phone calls - both local and international. Some families provide pocket money, but in most cases you need to fund your pocket money as well.

TIP: Use a VISA, MASTER CARD or AMEX to access your money. They are widely accepted throughout Thailand and you will be able to get cash from any ATM.

However, please mind that there is an additional 180 Baht fee on withdrawals so we recommend withdrawing your money only once per month to keep fees as small as possible. Of course you can open a Thai bank account with the help of your host family, which you can transfer your money to and withdrawal without a fee.

# Arriving in Thailand

All participants arrive at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi International Airport.

## Arriving at the airport:

We will meet you at the luggage control located right after you passed the immigration. You can recognize us by our AFS shirts. In case of an emergency please call P'Dio at +66 899-256-374. When calling inside Thailand you can skip the +66 and just press 0 instead.

Important: Please make sure you put the AFS luggage tags on your bags so we can recognize you as an AFS participant.

Our staff or volunteers will take you to the orientation site in Bangkok. The orientation will be mostly in English.

The students who will stay in Bangkok will be picked up by their host families directly. Everyone else will travel with an AFS volunteer/staff to their host community where their families will pick them up.



## Activities During the Program

Overall you will have 3-4 camps depending on your program.

Arrival Camp – Right after you arrived at the airport

Cultural Orientation Camp – 1-2 months after arrival (school based only)

Enrichment camp – 5-6 months after arrival – held in various regions (school based only)

Mid-stay camp 3 months after arrival (18+ only)

End-of-stay Camp - all programs offer some form of end-of-stay activity. Details will be given either before your arrival or during your stay.

AFS Thailand covers the cost of these camps and other orientation activities.

Also, during school holiday, there are optional activities that you can choose to join such as week exchanges, massage, meditation and English camps, becoming a Buddhist novice, etc.



# Safety Tips

Although Thailand is in general a safe place to stay, there are still some things you might want to keep in mind. Especially diseases like malaria and dengue fever can be a threat and therefore should be handled with caution.

## Drinking water

As Thailand is hot and humid, the first recommendation to stay healthy is to drink lots of water.

Most of the household will use the water filter to purify the water to be safe to drink or some household boil the tap water to drink. Although the Government has given a campaign that the tap water is drinkable but Thais tend to purify them before. However, buying water to drink is not expensive as well. A litre of water can cost from 7 – 20 THB.



## Stomach Trouble

Many exchange students that come to Thailand will experience some kind of stomach trouble in the beginning. However, that is due to the difference in food and hygiene. This should get better quickly and not pose a threat later on. Still you should make sure that the water you are drinking really is clean and safe. For this please ask your host family for support. To avoid this, please make sure that the water you drink is safe. Most food is safe to eat since host families and restaurants usually take care of the cleanliness of their ingredients. However, street food (food that is being cooked in front of you at street sides) might not be the best idea to begin with. You should make sure that you get used to Thai food slowly by eating well cooked food first.



## **Malaria & Dengue Fever**

Since Malaria is no problem in Thailand anymore, especially in the areas we place exchange students, it is generally safe to walk around outside without special care. However, Dengue fever is now a major problem throughout Southeast Asia.

Dengue Fever is a virus that can be spread by mosquitos just like malaria. Unfortunately this kind of mosquito not only is a threat during nighttime, but during daytime as well.

Symptoms are similar to those of the flu, with high fever, severe aches, fatigue, and possible skin rashes or headaches, lasting about a week. Drink plenty of water and seek medical attention immediately if you experience these symptoms.

Please make sure to use mosquitoes repellent once you have to go out in the dark.

Most of the Thai houses have mosquitoes net installed to every doors and windows and we have to make sure that it is properly closed especially during the nighttime.

## **Rabies**



As there are many street dogs in Thailand that are not taken care of, there is a constant threat of getting bitten and getting infected with diseases such as rabies.

Therefore, please stay away from street dogs, especially if you do not know if they are safe to or not.

In order to get the highest protection as possible we recommend getting a rabies vaccination especially if you are going to stay at the country side where the risk of contagious animals is higher. Moreover, please also see a doctor immediately after getting bitten by an animal to make sure is a concern in Thailand, as are bites from any stray animals -- infected or not. Such dogs are often members of a pack and can get aggressive toward strangers.

Occasionally, a rabid animal makes its way into the mix. Stay away from all stray animals and seek medical attention immediately, if you've been bitten, no matter if you had a vaccination or not. Even touching a diseased animal can cause rabies!



## **Uncomfortable social situations**

In general, knowing the culture is usually the best preparation to handle uncomfortable social situations.

If you are invited to go to a party or other event such as a rock concert or soccer game and are not sure it is safe to go, AFS recommends that you find out a little about the party or event, where it is being held and who is expected to be there. Usually your host siblings, parents, friends or teachers at school can give you information about the event and what kind of people are likely to go. Some host parents may also "forbid" students to attend certain kinds of parties, soccer games, etc. Students should respect the parents' advice, even if your friends might be going.

## **Specific Advice from AFS Thailand**

In Thailand the legal drinking age is 21 but it does not disallow drinking under this age. It is common that you find people under 21 drinking and it is acceptable in some, but certainly not in most families.

As an AFS student you are not permitted to drive. In Thailand a person must be 18 years old to get a drivers license. We suggest that the AFS students not get in any motor vehicle with a younger driver or someone without a license or with someone who has consumed any alcohol. If you are in this situation, you should contact your host family or someone from AFS, and they will tell you what to do to get home or a place where you should go. Remember - hitchhiking is forbidden!

You and your natural parents are fully responsible for damages caused by yourself to third parties and any cost involved in connection with such claims. AFS does NOT assume any legal liability for you!

You are subject to the law of your hosting country. Neither AFS nor the national government of your home country has the ability to protect you from punishment with respect to drugs, theft and other legal offenses.

## **Sexual Harassment**

Cultures differ in their views of appropriate sexual behavior and practices of young people. Often clarification of attitudes may be necessary and here, again the advice of people you have come to know and trust is very valuable.

Knowledge about the people you socialize with is important, and this is acquired best through increasing knowledge of the culture. Equally important are your own values and beliefs regarding your behavior. In societies where some young people are sexually active, there are also many that are not. You should not compromise your own personal values and beliefs regarding sexual behavior.

You may be unsure in some situations if you are being sexually harassed or if a particular person's behavior would be considered normally friendly.

An important source is your own instinct. Also often your host siblings/parents and friends will be able to advise you about normal behavior of people you do not know. Other resources to which you can turn for advice or help are teachers at school, and the AFS contacts within your community or at the national office.

Sexual harassment is likely to happen in any country and Thailand is no exception. We have had reports of unacceptable sexual harassment from males to females, but by far it has been the male AFS participants (both student and adult) who have had more problems.

If any sexual harassment occurs within the family home, you should not keep it a secret. The best action is to say "NO" and remove yourself from the situation: turn on lights, go where there are other people or make a noise, anything that will attract other people's attention and stop the person harassing you.

If you have any problems with any form of sexual harassment and do not feel comfortable speaking with your host family, please contact your counselor or the hosting staff at the AFS National office.

## **Comments on physical appearances**

Many Thai people are appearance oriented, and enjoy pointing out physical differences between themselves and foreigners. Most of the time this is meant in a lighthearted

way and should be taken as such. if these types of comments make you feel uncomfortable or unhappy, talk to your host family, advisor or any of the AFS Thailand Support Team.

## **Political unrest**

Thailand has been facing political turmoil for the past few years. The conflict occurs between two groups of political party supporters; the red shirt and the yellow shirt.

After the military has taken over control of the legislative branch demonstrations and riots have come to a stop.

The country is now in a state of control and it is business as usual again.

## **EMERGENCIES**

The role of military or police authorities may vary from country to country. Each country is different.

In Thailand adolescent boys are more likely than girls to find themselves being questioned by the police or other civil authority officer. AFS advises that you show respect and cooperation with authorities, even though you may be innocent of any crime and think that you are being treated unfairly.

In such a situation, it is unlikely that you will understand what is being said by the authority figure. In general, the best advice would be to say that you do not understand what is happening and identify yourself as an exchange student. It is advisable for students to always carry their AFS identification card. This is important not only in the event of being questioned by authorities, but also in the unfortunate event of a personal accident or if you become a victim of a crime and may not be able to effectively communicate.

In the case of an emergency you should try to call your host family, the local contact person or the AFS national office.

The numbers of AFS Thailand office are 0-2980-1002-5 ext 402-411 / 02-980-1723, 02-9801724



After working hours (9am - 5 pm) you can call any after hour hosting emergency phone numbers as follow;

089-925-6374, 098-747-1813, 081-984-3908, 081-754 -1740, 081-984-3908

In case of a national emergency you should follow the advice of the government or the local authorities. The national AFS office will immediately contact you in order to provide necessary help.

Thailand is a small quiet country, away from the international center of tension. You should be aware however, that the potential risk of international terrorist actions is everywhere in the world.

In the case which you need the present of police officers please dial 191

For an ambulance 1669

*Our special thanks goes to our involved staff, volunteers, host families, returnees, previous hosted participants and other affiliated organization who have support hosting programs along the way and for all the useful information that would be helpful tip for the newcomer.*

## RESOURCES

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By Robert and Nanthapa Cooper, Times Books International, Singapore, 1984. (About dos and don'ts in Thai culture)

### ***At Home in Thailand: A guide for Americans Living with Thai Families***

By Elizabeth Mortlock, United States Information Service, Bangkok. 1990

### **Thai for Beginners**

By Benjawan Poomsan Becker. Paiboon Publishing, Bangkok. 1995

### **Americans in Thailand**

By Algie J., Gray D., Grossman N., Hodson J., Horn R., and Hsu W., EDM Editions Didier Millet. 2014

### **Thai Social Etiquette**

By Mrs. Pensri Kiengsiri, Mrs. Sudchit Bhinyoying and Assoc. Prof. Malithat Promathatavedi, Ministry of Culture. 2007

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<http://www.thaiwebsites.com>

[http://www.m-culture.go.th/th/main.php?filename=M\\_Culture](http://www.m-culture.go.th/th/main.php?filename=M_Culture)