



Free & Easy Traveler - Travel Prep Guide

40 Days in Thailand: Experience the Land of Smiles

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The Basics

Duration: 40 Days

Start & Finish: Bangkok, Thailand

Adventure Type: Backpackers (age 18 to 27)

Trip Size: 15 – 22 (+2 group leaders)



Epic Experiences

Included in the Price

- Spend a night in a floating bungalow
- Swim through Phosphorescence
- Phi Phi Island/Maya Bay Sunset Boat Trip
- See “The Beach”
- Have “One Night” in Bangkok
- Have a tropical island all to yourself
- Dance until sunrise at the Full Moon Party
- Caving
- Authentic Thai Style Welcome Dinner
- River Tubing through a Rainforest
- Bangkok Temple Tour
- 3 Viewpoint Hikes
- 3-day Rainforest Lake Trip (All meals incl.)
- FNEZ sponsored beach cleanup

Optional Activities

- Practice Yoga
- Get any outfit you can imagine tailor-made
- Rock climb up a natural cliff face
- Go scuba diving
- Go bungee jumping
- Ziplining
- Snorkel Trip
- Lady Boy Show
- Boat Cruise
- Muay Thai Lessons
- Cooking Classes
- Fishing & Dinner (unless you weren’t able to catch anything..)

Trip Details

What’s included?

- Hand-woven jumbo hammock (\$100 value!)
- All Taxes (GST, PST, Airport tax)
- Return international flights (in/out Bangkok) and airport transfers***
- Accommodations for your 40-day Free & Easy experience
- Group travel between destinations
- 2 knowledgeable and fun Free & Easy leaders
- Free and Easy Travel Guidebook
- 15 years of trip leading experience

- ***Land Only prices do not include your international flight, airport taxes or transfers

What isn't included?

- All meals and drinks (except those mentioned in What's Included)
- Activities outside of the ones listed in the "Included in the Price" section above
- Any Visa or associated fees

Travel Budget (Canadian \$)

Thailand is a very cheap place to travel! Your personal spending on the trip will include your food, drinks, shopping, entertainment and any activities outside of those included on your FNEZ adventure.

For the entirety of our 40-Day Thailand Trip -- "Experience the Land of Smiles", we would recommend a budget of \$2000 - \$2500. Any travel budget will fluctuate between personalities, so ask yourself: "What type of traveller are you?"

The Hippie:

Brings about \$1800-\$2100 for the 20 days. Eats local food, bargains well at the market, finds good prices on drinks and picks and chooses their optional activities wisely! Often likely to continue travelling after their FNEZ trip is complete.

The Backpacker:

\$2100-\$2300 spending money. A bit more frivolous, but is aware of their budget. Takes in most activities they are interested in, without going too extravagant. Likes to party, but always looking for a good deal.

The Rock Star:

\$2300 - \$2700+ Spending money will allow for little to no worry about your budget. The Rock Star will do almost every single activity, including lavish amounts of shopping and partying often. There won't be too much holding them back from activities, as this is their trip and don't want to let anything pass them by.

To help you work out your budget, here are some examples to give you an idea what you will be spending in Thailand.

Food and Drink:

Typical Thai Meal at a Restaurant: \$2 - \$5

Green Curry Chicken \$3.50 - \$4.50 (includes a plate of rice)

Pad Thai w/ Seafood \$2 - \$3

Fresh fish/seafood meal \$4 - \$7

Pad Thai from Street Vendor: \$1

Western Meal: \$6

Half a Fresh-Cut Pineapple: \$0.30

Fruit Shake / Iced Coffee: \$1-\$2
Can of Coke: \$0.60
Big Beer at 7/11: \$1.80
Big Bottle of Whiskey at 7/11: \$7 - \$10
Big Bottle of Water: \$0.50
Big Beer at Bar/Club: \$3
Fruity Cocktail: \$3
Whiskey Bucket (Giant Cocktail): \$8

Entertainment & Activities:

All Day Snorkel Trip w/ lunch: \$20
Rock-climbing/Repelling, Full Day: \$23
Muay Thai Lessons: \$8.50
Scuba-Diving:
Fun Dive (Already Certified) – \$82
Discover Dive without pool – \$112
Discover Diver with pool – \$145
"Open Water" PADI Lifetime Certification – \$485
River Tubing, w/ transport - \$10
Cooking Class, 5 dishes - \$26
Muay Thai Fights, Admission - \$8
Yoga – \$8
Bungee Jumping:
First Jump – \$50
Jumps after – \$33
Ziplining – \$46
Boat Cruise - \$30-45

Shopping & Miscellaneous:

Designer label jeans \$15 - \$20
Designer shoes: \$15 - \$40
T-shirts: \$3 - \$5
1 Hour Thai Massage: \$6 - \$10
Laundry Service: \$1/kg

Trip Leaders

Every Free & Easy trip is accompanied by at least two leaders. We like to call them "Leaders" and not "Guides" because they are essentially your well traveled, experienced friends! We hire local guides whenever knowledge of culture, history or safety are necessary (ie; temple tours or jungle treks). Our Leaders main goals are to ensure everyone on the trip is having the best time possible. Our leaders will arrange the group transportation between destinations, sort out rooms at the accommodations, plan any group meals or activities and assist in any additional

activities that anyone may wish to take part in, and ultimately show you the best that each destination has to offer. They know the trip locations well, and have great relationships with all our contacts in each destination. Not to mention they are all extremely fun and easy going people who continue to showcase the essence of what makes us Free & Easy!

Flying to Thailand

Upon registration you can choose between booking your own flights or requesting Free & Easy to book flights for you.

If you book flights with Free & Easy:

- A flight itinerary will be emailed to you approximately 2 – 3 months before your trip's departure. (Assuming you have paid enough money on your account)
- One or both of your leaders will be at the airport in Bangkok to pick you up and arrange transport back to the guesthouse.
- Transportation will be arranged for you to get from the guesthouse at the end of the trip to get to the airport to catch your flight.
- You can also ask for any custom flights, and our flight team will give you a price quote for booking this for you.

If you don't book flights with Free & Easy:

- You will be contacted with information on meeting up with your group for the start of the trip in Bangkok.

Meals

The ability to experience local food, whether it's from a street vendor, a home stay, or a restaurant, is a huge part of travelling. You'll be able to ask your guides for great options to check out at every destination we go, but for the most part, the journey finding the food, tends to be just as good as the food itself! There will be times that meals will be provided for you, if you have any allergies or food preferences, i.e. vegetarian or peanut allergy, please let your leaders know!

Allergies!

If you have any allergies, especially food allergies, it is good to be prepared before coming to Thailand. Peanuts are the most common one and they are used a lot in Thai cooking. When you try to make special requests when ordering at a restaurant it doesn't always go as planned. The best thing to do is check out Killer Peanut (killerpeanut.com), where you can choose from a variety of food allergies and get it translated into Thai. Simply print out the translation and then show it to the server when ordering food in Thailand. This will make your life way easier when you arrive in Thailand!

Types of Transportation on this trip

- Minivans: The most common mode of transportation on this trip. We rent private, A/C minivans which hold approximately 10 people.
- Night Trains: Two night trains will be taken on this trip, once when leaving Bangkok and once when returning to Bangkok. Everyone has their own bed, (bunk-bed style!), and the cabin is A/C.
- Ferries: Between the islands we will be taking a wide range of boat ferries. Some are large enough to hold cars, some are speedboats, and then some are the smaller long-tail boats.
- Tuk-Tuks: One of the more fun ways to get around Bangkok and have an experience at the same time! These motorized little vehicles provide a quick and cheap way to get around. Always make sure you barter!

Accommodations

We have a wide range of accommodations on this trip from beautiful, but slightly rustic, beach bungalows to hotel style rooms with A/C. We have chosen each of our accommodations based on quality, location, and relationships with the establishments. Plus there is so much to do on this trip you won't be spending much time in your room anyway!

All our accommodation is based on at least two-person occupancy. If you wish to have your own room you can pay an additional fee in order to do so. Please contact travel@fnez.com before your trip begins if you are interested.

Solo Travelers:

Lots of solo travelers come on our trips and it's a great way to step outside your comfort zone and make lots of new friends. Since all of our accommodations are based on at least two-person occupancy you will be rooming with other members of the same sex in your group.

Packing Suggestions:

The shopping is cheap in Thailand so you may want to only pack half of your backpack, leaving room to buy new stuff once you arrive. Clothing is very cheap, and you can always find a good variety of stuff that is ideal for the tropical climate. Most people end up regretting how much they packed when they realize how easily they could have bought new clothes once they arrived.

It is good to properly prepare supplies for the trip, but don't stress out about having everything you think you might need, chances are you'll be able to find whatever it is during your trip. For example, there are many pharmacies that have medications and first-aid supplies. An exception to this is good quality shoes and/or sports sandals, as they are only really available in larger cities.

In general, you want to avoid packing things that you really don't need. There are definitely certain luxuries that are convenient, but you don't want to lug something around for 6 weeks unless you are going to use it. Also, consider that the weight of your bag will likely be INCREASING throughout the trip, and having a lighter backpack simplifies life immensely. Honestly, look at what you have and cut it in half and you're probably good to go. You're going to buy lots of new stuff.

Here's some ideas for what you might want to pack:

Travel Essentials

- Passport (digital and hard copy)
- Birth Certificate (digital and hard copy)
- Travel insurance (digital and hard copy)
- Airline tickets (digital and hard copy)
- Credit or debit card
- Any entry visas, additional passport photos or vaccination certificates required
- Cover for backpack/ziplock bags for travel essentials

Electronics/Entertainment

- Alarm clock
- Headlamp
- iPods, tablets
- Books, eReaders
- Camera (bring a few memory cards)
- Speakers
- All Chargers

Clothing

- Swim wear
- Walking shoes/sport sandals
- Shorts
- Temple attire (something to cover your knees and your shoulders)
- Shirts/T-shirts
- Rain jacket for May-August
- Underwear
- Sarong (travel towel)

First-aid kit

- All can be purchased in Thailand

Toiletries

- Deodorant in Thailand is not nearly as good and often contains whitening agents. Bring some from home.
- Girls bring feminine hygiene products as they can be hard to find.

Laundry

Laundry facilities are offered by some of the places we stay. Ask your leaders to point out the best places to get laundry done. There will be times when there are no laundry facilities, however your leaders will tell you this in advance.

Travel Essentials

There is nothing more important than your health and safety so make sure you read this carefully!

Passports

Everyone **MUST** have a passport for international travel. If you already have a passport, double check to make sure it is still valid for at least 6 months from the return date of your trip. If it is not valid for a full 6 months from the day you plan on returning to your passports issuing country, you'll have to apply for a new passport before you leave.

The application process for getting a passport may seem simple, but for most people it ends up taking longer than it first appears. Sometimes it can take a few weeks to complete the entire process, so we definitely recommend not leaving it to the last minute.

Insurance

Everyone **MUST** have Travel Medical Insurance of some kind and bring proof with you for this trip. You might not need to purchase a medical insurance policy though because you may already be covered through some other way:

- Your parent's work health plan.
- With a credit card.
- Through a student or work health plan.
- Through private insurance.

If you purchased Travel Medical Insurance through us and decide to extend your plane ticket, you also have the ability to purchase an extension to your insurance policy. **PLEASE NOTE:** It is your own responsibility to be making any extension to your insurance so you cannot expect this will automatically happen when you extend your plane ticket.

If you need to extend your TIC insurance please call 1-800-670-4426

Please Note: At this time we only provide Travel Medical Insurance for those with valid Canadian citizenship.

Immunizations

There are no immunizations that are ‘required’ for entry into Thailand. For your own safety, there are some shots that are always recommended for travel to tropical countries.

- Hepatitis A.
- Hepatitis B.
- Typhoid.
- Tetanus.
- Diphtheria.

We also want to warn you that sometimes travel clinics are over cautious to the extreme and try to sell you everything under the sun. If you want a second opinion about something, do some more research online or contact us. This is often the case with Malaria medication. We suggest you try to learn more about the exact locations of any malaria danger before you commit to taking the pills. We can truthfully say that, currently, none of the Free & Easy staff or owners take malaria medication when we are on any of our adventures. The feeling amongst many people is that the side effects of the pills are not worth the minimal risk in the regions we travel to. Rather than subject ourselves to the medications we choose to be cautious with mosquito repellent whenever they are present. Since we are not medical professionals we urge you to do your own research and make your own informed decision.

Banking & Money

The easiest way of getting and carrying your money is to simply use the bank machines in the country you are travelling. You can use your regular bank card, normal pin number, and the money will come out in the local currency (You need to make sure that you have “cirrus” or “plus” written on the back of your card). At nearly every destination on our trips, you’ll have easy access to a bank machine. This also means you won’t have to get local currency before you leave. Once you arrive, you can just use a bank machine right there at the airport.

Every time you need to make a transaction your account will be charged approx. \$5 fee from your bank and then a possible fee from the local bank. It can get a bit pricey if you’re making withdrawals every few days, so it makes more sense to take out a large sum, and just monitor your spending! Although theft does happen sometimes, we have found that it is quite rare. So we, ourselves, practice this method.

Be aware that if you are pulling money out on your credit card that this counts as a “cash advance” and you will immediately be charged interest on this amount and

not have a grace period or get reward points like you typically would with other credit card purchases. Additionally, you will still be charged those \$5 fees from your bank and the local bank. With this in mind the best option is always to pull out money using your debit card instead of your credit card.

Another suggestion we would like to reinforce is that we highly recommend that you have online banking during the trip. It allows you to check your balances, transfer money, and monitor your transactions from any internet café. In case of any issue with your bank card, online banking always simplifies a situation since you can easily transfer money to another traveler in your group who could then pull out money for you.

Another little helpful hint is signing over power of attorney to someone you trust (i.e., a parent). This means that they can have access to your accounts while you are away. This can help if you lose your bankcard, or there is a problem with it while overseas. It is also useful if you need someone to pay your bills, or make money transfers while you are away.

Thailand Travel Visas

Upon entry to Thailand (by air) most countries, (please check visa conditions for your country if not Canada) will automatically be granted a 30-day tourist visa (<http://thailand.visahq.ca/>). For this 40-day trip it is necessary that you obtain a 60-day visa before departing for Thailand. You can obtain this visa by taking your passport directly to the Thai consulate in your area, or by mailing it to any Thai consulate. Unfortunately we are not able to assist you in getting your visa because you must apply for it in person. It is a very simple process though—as we will explain below.

PLEASE NOTE: If you are planning on staying in Thailand after your 40-day trip, you will have additional time on your visa, before you have to leave the country to get your visa renewed. A further benefit of the 60-day visa is, if you decide you want to stay in Thailand more than 60 days without leaving, you are able extend your visa for an additional 30 days. In doing this, you must go to an immigration office in Thailand and pay their fee. At the beginning of your trip ask your group leader where the best spot to do this would be.

Obtaining Your Visa

Your 60-day visa must be used in Thailand within 90 days after it has been issued. This means that you will have to wait until it is within 90 days before the start of your trip to go get the visa. To obtain a visa from the Thai consulate, you'll need to bring the following:

- Your passport.

- Money for the cost of the visa.
- Your plane ticket itinerary which will be sent to you within the time needed.
- One passport sized photo of yourself.
- Make sure that you visit the Thai consulate during the specific office hours
- The picture can be black & white, or colour.
- Filling out the visa application will only take a few minutes and you can do this while you are at the consulate.
- It will take 2 business days to process your visa.
- You will also have to pick up your passport during their office hours.

Applying for your Visa by Mail

Besides applying in person at the consulate, you can also submit a visa application form by mail. If you do not live in any of the cities where consulates are located, this option allows you to fill out an application form and mail it in along with your passport to one of the consulates. In this case, a self-addressed and stamped envelope for the return of your passport is required, and it must be “First Class Registered Mail”. In the absence of the required self-addressed and stamped envelope, the Consulate states they are not responsible for returning the passport (Postage should not be included with the visa fee).

If you have any other questions, you can ask the employees at the consulate and they should be able to assist you.

PLEASE NOTE: (Only for those of you flying to Thailand on the same flight with other group members.) Before your flight has landed in Bangkok you will have to fill out an ‘Immigration Card’ for Thailand. One of the questions asks if you are ‘traveling on a tour group?’ You should check ‘YES’ for this question.

If you are not flying with the group, then you would check ‘NO’.

Prices for Visas

60-day visa (obtained from Thai consulate in Canada): \$40 CDN, go to <http://www.thaiembassy.ca> to find the nearest Thai Consulate.

*30-day extension to the 60-day visa (obtained in Thailand): \$65 CDN (subject to change without notice, please check with the nearest consulate for updated visa cost).

Please check the links provided below for countries outside of Canada for Visa requirements and prices.

(*If you decide to extend your stay in Thailand beyond 60 days without leaving the country.)

Visas for other Countries

Your country of origin may not need a Visa for Thailand, please check the Royal Thai Consulate general for your countries Visa Requirements [here](#).

Info on Royal Thai Consulates Australia:

<http://www.thaiconsulatesydney.org/country/a/australia>

Info on Royal Thai Consulates UK:

<http://www.thaiconsul-uk.com/>

Info on Royal Thai Consulates USA:

<http://thailand.visahq.com/embassy/united-states/>

Additional Info for Application

On the application form there are a few questions that require additional information. Please use the following information to complete your Thai Visa application:

Reference/Contact Person in the Thailand:

Name: Mrs Phaiwan Rakbauthong

35/5 Moo 6 T.KLONGSOK

A. PHANOM SURATTHANI

THAILAND 84250

Tel : 077-395-156

(She is the owner/operator our main agency in Thailand.)

Address in Thailand:

Wild Orchid Villa Guesthouse

8 Soi Chanasongkram, Pra Arthit Rd.

Bangkok, Thailand

(This is a guesthouse that we frequently use for our group's arrival in Bangkok.)

After choosing the consulate you wish to apply to, download the application form from their website as each consulate has their own version.

“Please also note that persons holding passports other than Canadian MUST be in Canada on a work visa, study visa, or Landed Immigrant status for us to issue them a visa. Otherwise, they have to obtain the visa in their home country (i.e.: the U.S.)”

****If you plan on traveling to other countries surrounding Thailand, there is a chance that you will need to get a visa before traveling there. These visas can all be obtained in Bangkok, but will normally take a few business days to process. Depending on the country, it will cost between \$15 and \$80. If you do not want to spend the time in Bangkok to process the visa, you may also apply for these visas in your country of residence. ****

Communication + Payment

Questions

Contact us using any of the methods below!

Phone: 1-800-403-5208

Email: travel@fnez.com

Communication

So you have signed up for a Free & Easy adventure and we hope to help make this the easiest travel experience of your life. We want to help you out with anything you need help with. However, there are always things that you will need to take care of yourself and we will make it as easy as possible to explain these things. So we need to have a bit of cooperation from your part and it starts with actually **READING** our emails :). Please make sure you read the emails we send leading up to your trip. We send emails to make sure you are as ready as you can possibly be for this travel adventure.

Most of the information we send will be coming through your [“Your Trip” account](#). Please make sure that you have all of the requirements taken care of prior to your trip. The “Your Trip” page allows you to view your account, balance owing and is a place for us to give you any downloads and news of the upcoming trip. You should receive an email in your inbox notifying you when we do post something on there. Please notify us if you find that you’re not getting the notifications.

Making Payments

Follow this [link](#) for a full outline of our payment options.

Check [here](#) for the payment schedules for all of our trips.

The \$200 deposit reserves your placement on a trip. For all the trips, we have arranged the payment dates to allow you the maximum time to pay for your trip. If you would prefer to pay for the entire trip all at one time, that is no problem. You can also make larger payments earlier whenever it is convenient for you. The payment dates that we have listed are just guidelines that state the last possible date by which payments should be made.

We would greatly appreciate that all payments be made on time. Meeting this simple request makes our job much easier, as it allows us to look forward and prepare for the trips, rather than figuring out who and where we need to collect money from. If you expect that a payment will be late, please email us to explain when we can expect the payment. Payment schedules for each of the trips can be reached by clicking the link above.

PLEASE NOTE: All additional costs (for flights, insurance, fees & extras) will be added to your statement of account on the 'your trip' page. Please, ensure that you add any additional charges to your final payment unless we require it sooner.

Cultural

Quick Facts on Thailand

- Thailand means “Land of the Free”, a phrase used to express pride in the fact that Thailand is the only country in SE Asia to avoid colonization by foreign powers.
- Thailand shares a border with four countries: Myanmar (formerly Burma) to the north and west, Laos to the north and east, Cambodia to the southeast, and Malaysia to the south.
- Thailand is home to the world’s largest gold Buddha, the largest crocodile farm, the largest restaurant, the longest single-span suspension bridge, and the world’s tallest hotel.
- Most young Thai men become Buddhist monks for at least a short period of time before their 20th birthday.
- Buddhism is Thailand’s largest religion with approximately 94.6% of the population practicing the religion. Muslims make up 4.6%, Christians 0.7%, and “other” 0.1%.
- The longest city name in the world is the full name of Bangkok, which is: “Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahinthalayutthaya Mahadilokphop Noppharat Ratcha- than burirom Udomratchaniwetmahasathan Amon Phiman Awatan Sathit Sakkathattiyawitsanukamprasit”. It means “City of Angels, Great City of Immortals, Magnificent City of the Nine Gems, Seat of the King, City of Royal Palaces, Home of Gods Incarnate, Erected by Visvakarman at Indra’s Behest.”
- The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami devastated Thailand’s coast, killing over 8,000 people. An estimated 1500 Thai children lost their parents and more than 150,000 Thais working in the fishing or tourist industries lost their livelihoods.

- A century ago, more than 100,000 elephants lived in Thailand, with about 20,000 of them untamed. Now, there are about 5,000 with less than half of them wild.
- The world's longest reigning monarch is Thailand's king: Bhumibol Adulyadej, who became King Rama IX in June 1946. He was born in the U.S. in 1927 when his father was studying medicine at Harvard. He owns a patent on a form of cloud seeding and holds a degree in engineering from Switzerland. He also plays the sax and composed Thailand's national anthem.
- Tiger Woods is the son of an American father and a Thai mother.
- Northern Thailand is a major producer of opium, which is a major source of income for the hill tribes. The northern tip of Thailand, the western tip of Laos, and the eastern corner of Myanmar make up what is called the "Golden Triangle" and is notorious for the production and trafficking of opium and heroin.
- Thailand has a reputation for sexual tolerance and is considered very safe for LGBT travelers. Transsexuals, also known as katoys or ladyboys, are very common in Thai society.
- In Thailand, the head is the most important part of the body. Consequently, no one must ever touch another person, even a child, on the head. Thai's always try to keep their heads lower than the head of any person who is older or more important, to show respect.
- The energy drink Red Bull originated in Thailand, and was originally called Red Guar (a kind of Ox).

Thai Etiquette & Customs

Thai value systems regarding dress, social behaviour, religion, authority figures, and sexuality are much more conservative than those of the average Westerner. Although the Thais are an extremely tolerant and forgiving race of people blessed with a gentle religion and an easygoing approach to life, visitors would do well to observe proper social customs to avoid embarrassment and misunderstanding.

Thai people are extremely polite and their behaviour is tightly controlled by etiquette, much of it based on their Buddhist religion. It is a non confrontational society, in which public dispute or criticism is to be avoided at all costs. To show anger or impatience or to raise your voice is a sign of weakness and lack of mental control. It is also counter productive, since the Thai who will smile, embarrassed by your outburst of anger or frustration is far less likely to be helpful than if you had kept better control of your emotions.

Revealing clothing, worn by either men or women, is a little disgusting to most Thais. Short shorts, low cut dresses and T-shirts and skimpy bathing suits come into this category (although this is normal to be seen on the beaches, it isn't in Bangkok).

In temples, long trousers or skirts must be worn, and monks should on no account be touched in any way by women. Shoes should always be removed when entering temples and private houses. For this reason, most Thais wear slip-on shoes to avoid constantly tying and untying laces.

The head is the most sacred part of the body, so should not be touched. The feet are the least sacred, so when sitting they should not point at anyone—most Thais sit on the floor with their feet tucked under their bodies behind them. To point, particularly with foot, is extremely insulting.

Thais do not traditionally shake hands, instead “the wai” is the usual greeting. The hands are placed together as in prayer, and raised upwards towards the face, while the head is lowered in a slight bow. The height to which the hands should be raised depends on the status of the person you are waiing. In the case of monks, dignitaries and old people the hands are raised to the bridge of the nose, with equals only as far as the chest. Young people and inferiors are not wai, but nodded slightly to. You will be regarded as a little foolish should you wai to them.

It is easy, entering a foreign culture for the first time, to make mistakes in etiquette. If you do so, just smile, wai the person you may have offended, and you are forgiven.

Smiles

Thais are famous for their smiles. The Thai smile can say many things. Thais smile when they are happy, amused, embarrassed, uncertain, wrong, annoyed or furious. As westerners, we are not generally able to interpret the type of smile we are receiving but be aware that it may not mean what you think it means.

Modest dress

A clean and conservative appearance is absolutely necessary when dealing with border officials, customs clerks, local police, and bureaucrats. A great deal of ill feeling has been generated by travelers who dress immodestly. When in doubt, look at the locals and dress as they do.

Shorts are considered improper and low-class attire in Thailand, only acceptable for schoolchildren, street beggars, and common laborers—not wealthy tourists! Except at beach resorts, you should never wear skimpy shorts, halter tops, low-cut blouses, or anything else that will offend the locals. Long slacks and a collared shirt are recommended for men in urban environments. Women should keep well covered. Swim- wear is only acceptable on the beach.

Emotions

Saving Face is very important in Thailand. Candor and emotional honesty—qualities highly prized in some Western societies—are considered embarrassing and counterproductive in the East. Never lose your temper or raise your voice no matter how frustrating or desperate the situation. Only patience, humor, and jai yen (cool heart) bring results in Thailand.

The use of the word ‘heart’ (jai) is very common in the Thai language, here are but a few examples; jai lorn—angry, nam jai—feelings, nork jai—unfaithful (adulterous) jai dee—good hearted, jai dum—black hearted,

Thai History

Thailand, or Siam as it was called until 1939, has never been colonized by a foreign power—unlike all of the other South and Southeast Asian nations. Aside from periodic invasions by the Burmese and the Khmers, and brief occupation by the Japanese in WWII, the kingdom has never been externally controlled for long.

The earliest civilization in Thailand is believed to have been that of the Mons in central Thailand. They brought a Buddhist culture from the Indian subcontinent. In the 12th century Thai princes created the first Siamese capital in Sukhothai, and started centers in Chiang Mai and most notably, Ayutthaya.

The Burmese invaded Siam in both the 16th and 18th centuries, at one point capturing Chiang Mai, and destroying Ayutthaya. When Thais expelled the Burmese they moved their capital to Thonburi. In 1782, the current Chakri dynasty was founded by King Rama I and the capital was moved across the river to Bangkok. In the 19th century, Siam remained independent by deftly playing off one European power against another.

The 20th century brought great change to Thailand. In 1932, a peaceful coup converted the country into a constitutional monarchy, and in 1939 Siam became Thailand. After WWII Thailand was dominated by the military and up until 1979 experienced more than twenty coups and counter coups interspersed with short-lived experiments with democracy. Democratic elections in 1979 were followed by a long period of stability and prosperity as power shifted from the military to the business elite.

The last 5 years of Thai politics have been “interesting” to say the least. There has been a lot of back and forth with who the PM should be. Basically people’s opinions are divided by class and a compromise is nowhere in sight. Both sides have held huge protests including occupying the airport and downtown Bangkok. The last year has seen a lot of political turmoil but now hopefully we are on our way to things being settled with elections and not civil disobedience!

Thai Food

If you have not yet had the pleasure of trying Thai food—then get ready for a treat. If you already love it then you know exactly what you’re in for—a trip of tasty delights for every single meal if you want it! Most people come for the beaches and end up falling in love with the culinary delights of Thailand.

Among the cuisines of Southeast Asia, Thai cooking is completely identifiable in its own right, incorporating all 5 tastes: sweet, sour, bitter, salty, and spicy. Whether chilli-hot or comparatively bland, harmony and contrast are the guiding principles behind each dish. Thailand was a cross roads of East to West sea routes causing its culture and cuisine to be infused with Persian and Arabian elements. Foreign recipes have been integrated with traditional Thai dishes, resulting in unique flavor that is unmistakably Thai.

In the South of Thailand, the coconut plays a prominent role in many dishes; its milk tempers the heat of chilli-laced soups and curries, its oil used for frying, and its grated meat is served as a condiment. Fresh seafood from the surrounding waters is abundant: fish, prawns, lobsters, crab, squid, scallops, clams and mussels. Cashew nuts from local plantations are eaten as appetizers or stir-fried with chicken and dried chilies. Chinese-Thai food, is popular in large cities, most notably noodle soup. Other foreign influences can be found in such dishes as kaeng matsaman (Massaman Curry), a mild Indian-style curry seasoned with cardamom, cloves and cinnamon; and satay—skewered meat with a spicy peanut sauce that originally came from Indonesia.

The Thai Language

At the places we visit on this trip you will have little troubles getting by only speaking English. Most Thais you will encounter speak at least a little English, so you will have very little trouble communicating, if even it is broken English and hand gestures. At the end of this section, we’ve included several words and short phrases that will set you up with the basics of communicating with the locals. If you are ambitious enough to learn these—or some of them—you’ll be amazed at how excited the locals are to hear you trying to speak Thai. Even if you only knew a few things like “hello” and “thank you”, you’ll find that the Thai people are incredibly appreciative when you try to use them. Plus, once you have started to get a feel for a few basic words, it becomes easier to start learning more and more. Here is a link for a website that can be used as a great tool for learning even more Thai.

<http://www.thai-language.com>

Basic Thai Words

Below is a listing of some of the most frequently used phrases. In the middle column—beside the Thai translation—there is always a ‘(khap/kaa)’ in brackets. The reason for that is because it is proper for men to say ‘khap’(sounds like ‘cap’) after they say anything, and it is proper for girls to say ‘kaa’(like saying ‘cat’, without the ‘t’ sound) after they say anything. So, to say ‘hello’, a man would say “sawadee kap” (sa-wa-dee-cap), and girls would say “sawatdee kaa” (sa-wa-dee-kah- hh).

- Hello/Goodbye/Welcome/Good morning—[Sawatdee \(khap/kaa\)](#)
- How are you?—[Sabai dee mai \(khap/kaa\)](#)
- I’m fine—[Sabai dee \(khap/kaa\)](#)
- How about you?—[Kun la \(khap/kaa\)](#)
- Thank you—[Khawp koon \(khap/kaa\)](#)
- Good Luck—[Chok dee \(khap/kaa\)](#)
- What’s your name?—[Kun choo arai \(khap/kaa\)](#)
- My name is John—[Pom choo John \(khap\)](#)
- My name is Jane—[Chan choo Jane \(kaa\)](#)
- Excuse me/Sorry—[Khaw toot \(khap/kaa\)](#)
- That’s alright/You’re welcome/No problem—[Mai bpen rai \(khap/kaa\)](#)
- Do you understand?—[Kao jai mai \(khap/kaa\)](#)
- Yes, I understand—[Kao jai \(khap/kaa\)](#)
- No, I don’t understand—[Mai kao jai \(khap/kaa\)](#)

Fun Stuff

Scuba Diving

Throughout your Thailand experience there will be several opportunities to try scuba diving. Scuba diving is an awesome experience that most people become hooked on as soon as they try it. The most common organization world wide for dive outfits and certification is PADI. The PADI shop we most often deal with is called Blue View Divers (on Koh Phi Phi). They offer a number of different options to allow people of all skill levels to experience the crystal clear waters of the region.

Check out Blue View’s [website](#) for a price list and more info. They also have a [Facebook page](#) where you can check out some really cool videos of diving in the region.

Having an Open Water certification is a great skill to have. It allows you to dive to a depth of 18 m all over the world. If you are on the 40-day trip, you will have enough time in Thailand to complete this whole course if you wish, as the course normally takes 3–4 days. If you wanted to get certified, but did not want to spend

that much time while you are on your trip, another option for becoming certified is to use PADI's "eLearning". This allows you to do the classroom portion of the certification at home, and then just concentrate on the fun underwater parts while in paradise! In this case you would pay PADI for the first part of the course online (~\$150), and then pay for the underwater part on the island. Be sure to say that you will be completing your course at Blue View Divers when you register. The classroom portion could probably be completed in a day or two at home. Then you could expect a morning of learning skills and then 4 fun dives while on the island.

If you are uncertain whether you want to do a whole dive course, but would like to try scuba diving, one recommended option for beginners is the 'Discover' Scuba Dive. This is normally a one day course that allows you to do the basic skills in the morning and then go diving that same day. You can only go to a depth of 12 meters, and the instructor pays close attention to you so that you are never in any danger. This is sort of a risk free trial—but we are quite certain you will love it!

Also be sure to check out this [link](#) about medical requirements and additional information on scuba diving.

If you're already certified then we don't need to tell you that diving is awesome! Give it a shot in Thailand!

Ideas for Reading

The classic Thailand book for backpackers is Alex Garland's "The Beach". It is quite good and a fun book to read either before or during your trip. The Leonardo DiCaprio movie based on the book is not as well respected. Although, it is worth a watch before you come out, just to get yourself pumped on the beautiful scenery of Koh Phi Phi.

Here are some other titles that seem to be popular:

- Traveler's Tales Thailand: True Stories—by Larry Habegger.
- Bangkok 8: A Novel—by John Burdett.

Buying some sort of guidebook on Thailand would also be a good idea because it'll have lots of info on things like the culture, history, and geography. It'll have maps and in-depth info on traveling the country. Books like the Lonely Planet or the Rough Guide are especially good if you are planning to travel on your own after the trip because they have all sorts of info on how to get around, where to stay, what to do, and how much things cost. There are also other books like National Geographic and the Insider Guide that have lots of pictures and are better for giving a more in-depth- background on Thailand in general. If you don't need the practical travel information, a book like this might be better.

A good place to start is Amazon, Chapters-Indigo or your favourite local book store!

Trip Locations

Day 1-3: Bangkok

Day 4&5: Koh Samui

Day 6&7: Koh Ang Thong Marine Park

- only on May – Sept trips

Lao Liang

- only on October to March trips

Day 8-16: Koh Phangan

Day 17-22: Khao Sok National Park

Day 23-27: Koh Phi Phi

Day 28-32: Railay

Day 33-38: Koh Lanta

- only on June to September trips

Koh Lipe

- only on October to May trips

Day 39-40: Bangkok

PLEASE NOTE: The above itinerary is tentative. You will receive your confirmed Free & Easy Traveler trip itinerary with the exact routing at least 30 days prior to your departure.

Please be advised we are constantly keeping an eye out for warnings and are well informed on the happenings in the places we go. Our ground team is frequently sending us first hand updates, ensuring the destinations we bring our groups to are safe!

Community Forests International (CFI)

Free & Easy Traveler has joined forces with Community Forests International (CFI) to turn the joy of world travel into an act of global conservation. Travel is an

extremely important part of our lives, getting to see and experience the world is what keeps us all connected and reminds us that we all live in the same world and deal with the same problems. But traveling around the world comes at a price and we are well aware of the many buses, planes, ships, etc. that we use to travel that harm the environment. Greenhouse gas emissions are driving increasingly dangerous climate change to the point that some of the places we love most are under threat and we don't want to contribute to the continuing destruction. So we decided to take action.

We Travel Carbon-Free

By tracking the flights of our staff members and calculating the resulting greenhouse gasses, we support CFI to go out and protect and manage a forest in Canada to pull those gasses back out. These emissions become securely stored at CFI's Whaelghinbran Farm. Read more about how CFI offsets our carbon [here](#).

One Traveler, One Tree

But we didn't stop there. Much of the work that CFI does supports community tree planting efforts in Africa and Canada. This work is having incredible results, and we wanted to strengthen their efforts so we decided that for each traveler that comes on a trip with us, we'll provide CFI with the support to plant a tree to help offset that traveler's carbon emissions.

These trees are being used as tools of environmental and social restoration. In Canada, some of these trees were planted along a degraded watercourse and will go on to provide habitat for salmon, trout, hawks and king fisher, just to name a few. In Africa, where CFI was born, these trees were planted as a part of ongoing restoration of degraded lands on the island of Pemba, Tanzania. These trees rebuild the soil that was too poor to grow crops, allowing for trees like mangoes and cassava to thrive and produce food.

We look forward to continuing our relationship with CFI and, along with your help, making the world a greener place to live and travel in! If you want to offset your travel emissions with CFI, or want to support tree planting around the world, find out how [here](#).