



Free & Easy Traveler - Travel Prep Guide

20 Days in Thailand: A Dose of Paradise

Page 2	The Basics - Trip Duration, Start/Finish cities, Destinations
Page 3	Epic Experiences & Trip Details - What's Included, Activities
Page 4	Trip Details - Travel Budget
Page 5	Trip Details - Travel Budget, Trip Leaders
Page 6	Trip Details - Flying to Thailand, Meals, Allergies, Transportation
Page 7	Trip Details - Accommodation, Solo Travelers, Packing Suggestions
Page 8	Trip Details - Packing Suggestions, Laundry
Page 9	Travel Essentials - Passports, Insurance, Immunization
Page 10	Travel Essentials - Immunization, Banking & Money
Page 11	Travel Essentials - Thailand Travel Visas, Contact & Address in Thailand
Page 12	Communication & Payment - Questions, Communication, Making Payments
Page 13	Cultural - Quick Facts on Thailand
Page 14	Cultural - Thai Etiquette & Customs
Page 15	Cultural - Smiles, Modest Dress, Emotions, History
Page 16	Cultural - History, Thai Food
Page 17	Cultural & Fun Stuff - Thai Language, Basic Words, Scuba Diving
Page 18	Fun Stuff & Trip Locations - Scuba Diving, Ideas for Reading, Tentative Trip Itinerary
Page 19	Community Forests International - We Travel Carbon-Free, One Traveler, One tree
Page 20	Community Forests International

The Basics

Duration: 20 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
- Authentic Thai Style Welcome Dinner
- Bangkok Temple Tour
- Swim through Phosphorescence
- Phi Phi Island/Maya Bay Sunset Boat Trip
- See “The Beach”
- River Tubing through a Rainforest
- Have “One Night” in Bangkok
- Dance until sunrise at the Full Moon Party**
- Caving
- 3 Viewpoint Hikes

** Only on trip dates that land on Full Moon

Optional Activities

- Yoga
- Rock climbing
- Get any outfit you can imagine tailor-made
- Cooking class
- Scuba Diving
- Muay Thai fights
- Ziplining

Trip Details

What's included?

- Rainforest Lake Trip (All meals incl.)
- All Taxes (GST, PST, Airport tax)
- Return international flights (in/out Bangkok) and airport transfers***
- Accommodations for your 20-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 above)
- Activities outside of the ones listed above
- Any Visa or Visa fees

Travel Budget (Canadian \$)

Thailand is a very cheap place to travel, which is just one of many reasons that makes it so much fun! Your personal spending on the trip will include your food, drinks, shopping, entertainment and any activities outside of those included your FNEZ adventure.

For the entirety of our 20 Day Thailand Trip, "[A Dose of Paradise](#)", we would recommend a budget of \$700 - \$1300. Any travel budget will fluctuate between personalities, so ask yourself: "What type of traveller are you?"

The Hippie:

Brings about \$700-\$900 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:

\$900-\$1200 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:

\$1300 - \$1600: Not too worried about their budget, they'll do almost everything, 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

Following jumps \$33

Ziplining: \$46

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, please let your guides 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 it is 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. Best thing to do is check out Killer Peanut, 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 longtail 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 you 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 our accommodation is 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 too much about having everything you think you might need because chances are that you will be able to find whatever it is during your trip. Good quality shoes and/or sports sandals are an exception to that as they are only really available in larger cities. There are also many pharmacies that have medications and first-aid supplies.

In general, you want to avoid packing things that you really don't need to have. There are definitely certain luxuries that are good to have, but you don't want to lug something around for 20 days 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.

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

Travel Essentials

- Passport (make copies)

- Travel insurance (digital 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)
- All chargers
- Speakers

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 guides 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 that 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 passport 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.

While you are away traveling with us, if you 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 say truthfully, 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.

Check out this [link](#) for more information about immunization requirements.

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, using your regular 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 then just watch 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 are automatically granted a 30-day tourist visa. For this 20-day trip it is NOT necessary that you obtain a visa before departing for Thailand (please check visa conditions for your country if not Canada [here](#)).

PLEASE NOTE: If you are planning on staying in Thailand after your 20-day trip you will have additional time on your visa (10 days) before you would have to go to a Thai consulate to extend your Visa an extra 30 days, which is 1900 Baht.

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

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

Wild Orchid Villa Guesthouse

8 Soi Chanasongkram, Pra Arthit Rd.

Bangkok, Thailand

**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 get. 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 Canada. **

Communication + Payment

Questions

Contact us at any of the below methods!

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 start with actually **READING** our emails :). Please, make sure you read the emails we send leading up to your trip because we are sending them to make sure that 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 as well you can also view your account and balance owing and a place for us to give you your downloads and hear 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 our trips.

The \$200 deposit reserves your placement on a trip. If your trip is one of the May– Aug trips, you must confirm your placement on that trip by making another \$500 payment by Dec. 10th. 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 because it allows us to always be looking forward and preparing 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 waid, 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.

Dressing appropriately is important in urban environments and local markets. Shorts and tank tops are acceptable for males and females nearly everywhere, provided the shorts are just above the knee or longer. For females, wearing skimpy shorts, halter tops, or low-cut blouses will likely offend locals and lead to unwanted attention. For men walking around the street without a shirt on is equally unacceptable. However, once we get to chilled out tropical island towns, and on the sandy white beaches board-shorts and bikinis are just fine!

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 chillies. 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 “sawatdee 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.

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 4-7: Koh Phangan

Day 8-10: Khao Sok

Day 11-14: Railay

Day 15-18: Koh Phi Phi

Day 19-20: 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.