



head in the clouds?
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Thailand – Land of Smiles

Silky-soft beaches, jungle-draped mountains, incredible food, and a well-connected position at the heart of Southeast Asia have made Thailand a tourism hub for decades.

It welcomes more than 11 million visitors a year. All the same, travelers who dream of perpetually sunny skies and balmy weather might be dismayed at the pelting rain that arrives like clockwork every July or the sky-high price of their hotel from December to January.

The kingdom is full of diversions – myriad night markets, thundering waterfalls, even cherry blossoms, and the occasional dusting of frost – but to experience them for yourself, you need to be in the right place at the right time.

Travelling to Thailand, a place proud of heritage and Buddhism offers an insight into the fight to sustain its past while a booming economy beckons.

From the Grand Palace to the rice paddies of Chiang Mai, Thailand's diversity of adventure and culture combine to be the perfect mix for a first-timer's country or those who want to delve deeper. Maybe a trip to remote Northeastern Thailand to visit 13th-century temples or why not head to Phangnga Bay home to a multitude of limestone islands.

Thailand along with its expanding cities, natural landscapes never cease to amaze from the Northern jungles of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai where waterfalls become an ideal swimming spot as lush forests dominate the mountainous horizon all while golden beaches and oceans sustain some of Thailand's most pristine and unique sea life.

Travelling in Thailand has it all from exotic cuisines, endless opportunity for adventure and some of the friendliest people in the world. What more could you ask for?

Why you should visit this beautiful location -

With so much to see and do in Thailand, it really is hard to pick the top experiences. However, we think that to truly appreciate Thailand you need to plan to do these 5 activities during your visit.

- **Scuba Diving** - Thailand is the place to get scuba certified. The courses are among the cheapest in the world and the trainers are highly qualified. If you are already certified, dives are cheap.
- **Yoga Retreats** - Thailand caters to those of us who are looking for a place to recharge our minds and bodies. With lots of affordable options, a retreat should be on your must-do list.
- **Thai Cooking Classes** - Thai food is so delicious, so why not learn to cook it yourself? There are many cooking classes available throughout the country.
- **Island Hop** - Thailand offers some of the most spectacular beaches in all of the world. Most of these are on islands only accessible by boat. Fortunately, transport is cheap and easy so get out and find your favourite beach!
- **Temples and Culture** - Buddhism is an essential and vibrant part of Thai life and temples are all over the country. To learn more, respectfully engage in conversation with monks. And at some of the temples, you can learn meditation for the day or have a meal for a small donation.

While planning is essential, leave room for spontaneity. Unexpected discoveries often become cherished memories. Don't over-plan every minute; leave space to embrace the unexpected – that's where some of the best experiences occur!

Crafting a Thailand itinerary involves understanding your preferences, making informed choices, and allowing for flexibility. By embracing the country's diversity and weaving in your interests, you'll create a personalized and unforgettable Thai experience.

What to do to fill up your days:

Other Things to do in Thailand:

- **Rock climb.** Krabi is known for many things, rock climbing among them. Railay Beach is the most popular place to give the sport a try.
- **Get a Sak Yant tattoo.** Sak Yant tattoos are sacred and blessed tattoos inscribed by monks using traditional bamboo tattoo methods. Definitely a permanent memory from your time in Thailand.
- **Ride a tuk-tuk.** These three-wheeled vehicles are the most common way to navigate the busy streets in most Thai cities. You'd be hard-pressed not to find them convenient and affordable during your travels.
- **Visit a floating market.** Bangkok has the most famous floating markets. But you can tour others throughout the country for a uniquely Thai feel.
- **Eat Pad Thai.** Sure you've probably had Pad Thai at your favourite Thai restaurant back home. But you've never had it as you will in Thailand itself.
- **Watch a Ladyboy show.** Seemingly peculiar yet incredibly popular and well respected in Thai culture, the Ladyboy Cabaret's will leave you entertained for sure.
- **Walk on the Bridge Over the River Kwai.** Famous in its own right, the bridge is worth a stroll when you are visiting Kanchanaburi.
- **Visit the Golden Triangle.** Thailand, Laos and Myanmar come together at what is called the Golden Triangle. Visit here to take in all 3 countries at once.

- Visit the Bangkok Airplane Graveyard. It's never good to think of planes and graveyards in the same thought. Unless you can explore the ruins of massive and historic planes.

Catch a sunset at the Phi Phi viewpoint. Sure there are plenty of amazing places to end your day in Thailand. But Koh Phi Phi boasts just about the best sunsets as anywhere else in the country. Watch Muay Thai fights. You can watch Muay Thai at any number of venues around Thailand. Or take a lesson in Bangkok if you're up for the challenge. See the Big Buddha. Buddhism is big in Thailand. And nothing demonstrates this more than the Big Buddha in Phuket.

Must-Visit Places In Thailand

Bangkok: Vibrant Capitol

The capital of Thailand has become one of the most popular gateways to Asia. No trip to Thailand is complete without a few days in Bangkok.:

- *Your first stop on any trip to Bangkok should be the Grand Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.*
- *The Temple of Emerald Buddha, or Wat Phra Kaew, is considered the most important Buddhist temple in Thailand. It's a must-see on any trip to Bangkok.*
- *Buddhists from all over Asia come to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha to pay respect.*
- *The statue is carved from a single jade stone and the Emerald Buddha is in a meditating posture. It is located within the Grand Palace.*
- *The cloak around the statue is changed by the king three times a year, corresponding to the summer, winter and rainy seasons – a ritual performed to bring good fortune to the country.*
- *The Grand Palace is the former home of the monarch and situated on the ground of the Wat Phra Kaew.*
- *While the king no longer lives here, the Grand Palace is still used for important ceremonial occasions.*
- *Checking out the Grand Palace is simply fascinating! Aside from the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, there are so many things to see at the Grand Palace. The massive temple complex has amazing architecture and design, as well as landscaped gardens.*

Opening hours: 8:30 am to 3:30 pm daily

- *Wat Pho is only a 10-minute walk from Grand Palace. You can easily visit both the Grand Palace and Wat Pho in the same morning.*

On the way, you'll find many food stalls where you can try some delicious snacks if you're feeling peckish.

Also known as the Reclining Buddha, the impressive Wat Pho is covered in gold leaf and mother-of-pearl ornaments, is 46 metres long and 15 metres high.

The Wat Pho complex also contains four chapels with over 300 gilded Buddha images and a courtyard with Chinese statues and stupas decorated in ceramic pottery flowers and sparkling tiles.

- *Wat Arun Temple of Dawn*

Hop on a ferry from No. 8 Tha Tien to Wat Arun pier (the ride is 3 Baht).

The temple's name is derived from the Hindu god, Aruna, often personified as the radiations of the rising sun.

The surface of Wat Arun temple reflects the first light of the morning and has steep piers reaching up to the sky.

In the middle of the temple is an 82-metre high Khmer-style tower where you can walk up the stairs and enjoy the view of Bangkok and the Chao Phraya River.

Hours: 8:00 am to 6:00 pm daily

- *Explore Chinatown*

Bangkok's vibrant Chinatown is a must-visit and is located along the Chao Phraya River.

After your temple visits, hop on the ferry and get off at No. 5 Ratchawong Pier.

Also known as Yaowarat, Bangkok's Chinatown is one of the oldest parts of the city and represents the first resettlement of Chinese dating back to 1782,

Enjoy some late afternoon delights from the delicious street food vendors or meander through the maze of little alleyways and the bustling markets.

- *Muay Thai & a Night Out*

With three days in Bangkok, you have to check out Muay Thai. Muay Thai or Thai Boxing, is the national sport of Thailand and something for which Thais are very proud.

Dating back hundreds of years, Muay Thai is said to have been one of the eight disciplines that Thai men needed to master and was used in the Army.

While boxing only uses two points of contact (the fists), Muay Thai fighters use their elbows, legs, shins and feet just as much.

Bangkok is home to two major stadiums that host Muay Thai events, Rajadamnern Boxing Stadium and Lumpinee Stadium.

The two stadiums operate on alternate days so Rajadamnern Stadium hosts on Monday, Wednesday and Friday while Lumpinee hosts fights on Tuesday and Thursday.

Both stadiums hold fights on Saturday.

The first fight usually commences at 6 pm with the main fights later in the evening (but usually take place around the middle).

You'll notice fighters making their way to the ring wearing the traditional Mongkon headband, a sacred item given to the fighter by his trainer that is commonly blessed by monks.

Be sure to book tickets ahead of time to avoid selling out. If you're keen to give Muay Thai a try, there are plenty of gyms that offer classes whether you're a complete beginner or experienced in boxing.

- *Night – Party in Khao San Road*

After the boxing event, it's time to burn off some of that adrenalin built up from watching the matches.

Head to Khao San Road for some drinks and a bit of a wild time (if that's what you're into).

- *Lumphini Park*

To continue your lazy morning of your 3 day itinerary, head to Lumphini Park, Bangkok's largest park that feels like a deep breath of fresh air.

The park is enjoyed by both locals and visitors as it's a nice escape from the usual crowded streets of Bangkok and is also very well maintained.

- *Chatuchak Weekend Market*

If your visit to Bangkok happens to crossover on a weekend, a visit to Chatuchak Weekend Market can't be missed.

You could easily spend a few hours here getting lost in the place.

The market is accessible by public transport and is the perfect place to do any shopping and to pick up some souvenirs.

The range of merchandise is extensive and you can find clothes, art, shoes, home decor items and more.

Many of the shops operate on a fixed price policy and won't give in to haggling but it's always worth a shot as some places are more agreeable.

There is also a great selection of street food in the markets so come hungry for pad thai or spring rolls.

Bring cash!!

Opening hours: 6:00 pm to Midnight on Friday; 9:00 am to 6:00 pm on Saturday and Sunday.

Admission: FREE

- *Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA)*

You may not expect contemporary art to come out of Thailand but this is a world-class contemporary art museum with a focus on Thai artists.

The museum showcases and exhibits works of art collected over the past three decades by Boonchai Bencharongkul, whose passion for art runs deep.

In the 20,000 square metres of white space, some 800 works selected from Bencharongkul's private collection are exhibited.

The range of artworks is incredible and for anyone who appreciates and enjoys contemporary art, this can't and shouldn't be missed.

Opening hours: 10:00 am to 6:00 pm daily. Closed Monday.

- *Floating Market*

Located 1.5 hours from Bangkok, the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market is sure to be a highlight attraction.

The market is located in Ratchaburi Province. Once there, you can find a driver on a longtail boat to navigate you along the narrow canals of the market.

At the market, you'll see a colourful display of various fresh products such as fruits and vegetables as well as prepared dishes – all for sale from boats.

Here, you can try the different produce and pick up some lunch along the canal. Be sure to try some mango sticky rice, boat noodles or coconut ice cream!

You can book an awesome half-day tour of the floating market here, which is what I recommend doing.

Try some fresh fruit and vegetables from the floating market.

Phuket: Thailand's largest island

For the best introduction to the stunning scenery and warm culture of Thailand, visit Phuket, the country's largest island. Attractions include:

The Best Things to Do in Phuket

- **1) Visit Wat Chalong**

Phuket has 29 Buddhist temples, but Wat Chalong is the biggest and most popular.

The entire temple complex is very large, with landscaped gardens, golden statues, and stunning architecture.

Wat Chalong has a strict set of rules about dress code and respectful behaviour, as does every temple in Thailand.

You must remove your shoes before entering a temple, and wear clothes that cover your shoulders and knees.

Wat Chalong is the most popular temple in Phuket!

- **2) Hike to the Karon Viewpoint**

Also known as the Kata Viewpoint, this hilltop lookout sits just south of Kata Noi Beach.

It offers spectacular views of the turquoise Andaman Sea and the surrounding beaches and towns of Phuket.

The third name for this lookout is the “Three Beaches Viewpoint” because you can see the nearby Kata Noi Beach, Kata Beach, and Karon Beach from the top.

If you want a bit of exercise, you can hike to the viewpoint from the Karon neighbourhood.

Most of the walk is just along the main road, and it takes usually 45 minutes to an hour depending on where you start.

Just ask the staff at your accommodation for directions.

- **3) Explore Phuket Old Town**

In the southeast corner of the island lies Phuket Old Town, a scenic neighbourhood revealing remnants of the island’s colonial past.

Phuket used to have a thriving tin mining industry, so Sino-Portuguese, Chinese and Malay immigrants flocked here and became rich off of the popular metal.

Nowadays, the colourful architecture and elaborate mansions of the wealthy foreigners still stand, so travellers can catch a glimpse of the different cultures that planted their roots here.

- **4) Experience the Phuket Weekend Night Market**

On the topic of street markets, this is Phuket’s largest night market.

Locally known as the “Naka Market,” The Phuket Weekend Night Market is massive, with an indoor section selling mainly clothes and souvenirs, and an outdoor, open-air section selling everything else.

You can find everything from second-hand shoes, to CDs and movies, to fresh fruit and stands selling corn on the cob and deep-fried insects.

Strolling around this market is truly an adventure, and you’ll probably see some crazy things.

Try to visit the market as early as possible because the crowds can get insane.

Also try and walk there if you can because there aren’t many places to park, especially later in the evening when it gets busy.

Location: 7 Wirat Hong Yok Road, Phuket Town, Muang, Phuket 83000

Hours: 4 pm to 10 pm, every day

- **5) Parasail over Patong Beach**

Patong Beach is one of the busiest and most touristy beaches on the island.

Though it isn't the most peaceful beach, it is still beautiful and there are tons of tour companies offering fun activities like parasailing.

This water sport seems a little scary at first, but it is super fun for those who want an adrenaline rush.

You are basically strapped to a seat that hangs down from a parachute, which is tied to a motorboat by a rope.

As the boat accelerates, the wind catches the parachute, lifts you up and you glide through the air behind the boat.

Parasailing is an exciting way to experience Patong Beach.

Just make sure you ask for the prices at lots of different tour operators before booking so you can compare the costs.

- **6) Admire the Big Buddha**

Visiting the Big Buddha is definitely one of the top things to do in Phuket.

Made of white Burmese marble and standing at a whopping 45 meters tall, the Big Buddha is a magnificent landmark of the island.

Construction of the Big Buddha began in 2004, so it is a relatively new structure and is very well-maintained.

Sitting high on top of Nakkerd Hill, this spot offers lovely panoramic views of the island as well.

Try to visit the Big Buddha as early as possible to avoid the tour buses that stop here during tours of the island.

The road leading up to the Big Buddha starts at Chalong Circle and is a winding uphill drive, but there are plenty of signs to guide the way

- **7) Learn to Make Cocktails at Chalong Bay Rum Distillery**

Tasting and learning about local alcohol is a great insight into any culture.

Visit the Chalong Bay Rum Distillery, one of the best Phuket attractions, to taste rum made from organic Thai sugarcane and learn about the rum-making process.

Between 2 pm and 6 pm, you can take a 30 minute guided tour of the distillery to learn about the art of making rum, and you'll get to try a classic Chalong Bay Mojito.

To become even more of a rum expert, you can take a 2-hour cocktail workshop.

Held every day at 4 pm, the workshop includes a tour of the distillery, lessons on making 3 different cocktails, and tapas. Try to book this workshop in advance in case it sells out!

You can also just visit the distillery during their daily hours of operation and look around and eat at the restaurant if you don't have time for a tour or a workshop.

- **8) Soak in the Views from Khao Khad Viewpoint**

For an uncrowded viewpoint over the city, head to the top of a high and remote hill on the island's southeast peninsula.

Here lies Khao Khad Viewpoint, also known as the Panwa Viewpoint because it's located in Phuket's Cape Panwa region.

This lookout provides gorgeous views over the turquoise waters and rugged outlines of Phuket's southern coast.

You can see Phuket Town when you look north, and in the other directions, you can see various beaches and islands mingling with the ocean.

The lookout structure has two levels and you have to climb 200 steps to get there.

But there usually aren't many tourists here, as it is less popular than Phuket's other viewpoints.

- **9) Beach-Hop Down Phuket's West Coast**

Of all the things to see in Phuket, the beaches are probably the best.

The sight and sound of turquoise waves rolling over the soft golden sand never gets old, so be sure to pack plenty of beach days into your travels around Phuket.

There are so many beaches on the island it seems impossible to visit them all, so here is a list of some of the best ones.

The most beautiful beaches are on the west side of the island, so this list will start in the north and list beaches heading south down the coast.

Mai Khao Beach is located just north of Phuket Airport and is the island's longest beach (11km long).

Nai Yang Beach is inside Sirinath National Park, so there isn't much development to detract from the natural beauty and serenity of the area.

Bang Tao Beach has refreshing, clear blue waters and is pretty large at 8km long.

Surin Beach is lined with fancy hotels and ritzy bars and restaurants, so it has an exclusive, almost luxurious atmosphere.

Freedom Beach is quite small at only 300m long, but it offers great snorkelling and jaw-dropping scenery.

Kata Noi Beach is the smaller, less crowded neighbour of Kata Beach. Both are incredibly beautiful with plenty of restaurants, hotels, and amenities nearby.

Karon Beach is one of the island's more popular beaches, but it is quite spacious so it never feels too crowded.

Nai Harn Beach has only recently become known to tourists. With a more relaxing local vibe and rugged coastal scenery, Nai Harn Beach is a quiet and less touristy option.

Rawai Beach is actually on the southern coast of Phuket. It is one of the oldest beaches on the island and you can watch the local fishermen at work.

- **10) Stroll Through Chillva Market**

Of all Phuket's markets, Chillva Market is one of the newest.

It attracts a younger, local crowd with its trendy shops and quirky, bohemian atmosphere.

Old shipping containers house lots of the shops and colourful decorations and tea lights bring a vibrant energy to the market.

Chillva Market is also quite small compared to the other night markets in Phuket, so it feels more intimate and relaxed.

You can find interesting clothes, accessories, and shoes here as well as delicious local Thai food and live music.

Location: 141/2 Yaowarat Road, Phuket Town

Hours: Shops in shipping containers are open every day except Sunday from 5 pm to 10 pm. The full market is Thursday to Saturday from 5 pm to 11 pm.

- **11) Venture to the Bang Pae Waterfall in Khao Phra Thaeo National Park**

This is one of the best things to do in Phuket for nature lovers.

Spend a day venturing into the lush forest near the eastern coast of the island and find the Bang Pae Waterfall.

Located in the Khao Phra Thaeo National Park, this is the biggest waterfall in Phuket, standing at 18 meters tall.

The rainy season (May through October) is the best time to visit the waterfall due to the increase in rainfall.

During the dry season (November through April), the rock pools may not be deep enough to swim but you can still take cool photos and soak in the serenity at Khao Phra Thaeo National Park.

Phuket's second-highest waterfall, Ton Sai Waterfall, resides near the Bang Pae Waterfall in the same national park, so you could even see both in one day.

- **12) Take a Tour of the Surrounding Islands**

Spending a day hopping from island to island is definitely one of the best things to do in Phuket, Thailand.

Thailand has over a thousand islands, and it would be very difficult to see them all but a half-day island-hopping tour by boat can help you at least catch a glimpse of the pristine beauty of the Thai islands.

Phuket makes a perfect starting point for an island tour because there are so many tour companies offering different packages for different prices that suit any traveller.

Most island tours stop at a few different islands and finish in the early afternoon, so just pick which islands you want to see and find a tour that hits those spots.

One of the most popular places to visit on an island tour is Phang Nga Bay, also known as James Bond Island. Here you can see towering limestone rock formations were made famous by a James Bond movie.

It's also home to Koh Yao Noi, which is one of our favourite Thai islands. Read all about it here.

Similan Island is another beautiful spot that is perfect for snorkelling on a day trip when you visit Phuket.

BOOK A TOUR TO JAMES BOND ISLAND (TWT Purple)

Racha Island and Coral Island also have favourable snorkelling conditions and are great spots for diving, parasailing, and island hopping.

The Phi Phi Islands are also a hotspot in the area. You can also take a full-day boat tour to the Phi Phi Islands, which are arguably one of the most picturesque island chains in the Andaman Sea.

BOOK A DAY TOUR TO KOH PHI PHI (TWT Purple)

- **13) Challenge the Mind at the Phuket Trickeye Museum**

This interactive museum in Phuket Town is entertaining for people of all ages.

Full of detailed and realistic 3D paintings and scenes, visit Phuket Trickeye Museum to pose in certain places and look like you are part of the painting.

You have to remove your shoes to keep all the paintings clean, as you will be climbing all over them.

Bring a camera and have a blast taking hilarious photos with these beautifully crafted scenes at the Phuket Trickeye Museum.

- **14) Take a Thai Cooking Class**

If you're even a little bit passionate about food, a Thai cooking class is definitely one of the best things to do in Phuket Island.

Book a cooking class and learn how to cook all the irresistible and world-famous Thai dishes such as pad thai, curry, spring rolls, Thai iced tea, and desserts like mango and sticky rice or coconut fried bananas.

A Thai cooking class is an amazing insight into the Thai culture and its famous culinary secrets, and you'll get to taste all the delicious Thai food you make.

There are lots of tourism companies in Phuket that offer tours to different cooking schools around the island.

But it's always best to book in advance. Check out a half-day cooking class that includes a local market tour in Phuket Old Town.

- **15) Visit the Karon Temple and Market**

Wat Karon is another magnificent temple in Phuket, and it is home to a bustling market every Tuesday and Friday.

So after checking out the temple, you can wander around and shop for local products while snacking on street food.

This market sells mainly clothes and accessories, including scarves, sunglasses, and handbags.

You can also find health products made from locally sourced ingredients, such as coconut oil, aloe vera and handmade soaps.

- **16) Go Diving**

If you are a certified scuba diver, there are some incredible underwater sites around Phuket that you can visit as a day trip.

Book a day tour with any of the tourism companies on the island and go scuba diving in the Andaman Sea.

Most scuba diving trips leave from Chalong, so you'll need to make your way to that part of the island first.

The best time for diving in Phuket is from November through April, during the dry season as the water visibility is the best.

But you can still go diving during the rainy season, May through October, as the water is still quite clear despite the frequent thunderstorms.

The water is pretty warm year-round and there are lots of aquatic wildlife including manta rays, seahorses, reef sharks, colourful fish, and fascinating coral reefs. Some popular diving sites that may be included in a day trip include Shark Point and Anemone Reef.

King Cruiser is a shipwreck from 1997 that is cool to explore as well, and the nearby Racha Islands and Koh Phi Phi Islands also offer amazing diving.

- **17) Watch a Muay Thai Boxing Match**

One of the most exciting things to see in Phuket is a Muay Thai Boxing match.

This combat sport is fast-paced and a favorite among locals.

Muay Thai boxing athletes are very impressive, with their lightning speed agility and skilful precision.

Patong Boxing Stadium is the local boxing stadium where you can watch a match or even take a Muay Thai training class.

Only take the training class if you're reasonably fit, as it is a challenging day of fitness and learning hard self-defence moves.

A single Muay Thai session at Patong Boxing Stadium costs 500 Baht.

Otherwise, you can just attend a match and watch the professionals excel at their craft.

- **18) Visit Khao Rang Viewpoint**

You may have noticed that Phuket island has lots of viewpoints.

The island is so mountainous and scenic that one lookout point is simply not enough.

The Khao Rang Viewpoint, also called Rang Hill Viewpoint, is located pretty far inland but faces southeast so you can get an amazing view over Phuket Town and the distant sea.

There is a spacious viewing platform for taking photos, an open-air pagoda, and a few nice cafes and restaurants.

The landscaped gardens and thick jungle atop the hill make a cozy habitat for monkeys, so don't be surprised to see some while exploring the viewpoint.

- **19) Experience Bangla Road**

Bangla Road, locally known as Soi Bangla and alternatively known as Patong Walking Street, is a 400-meter strip of excitement.

Located in the heart of Phuket's Patong area, this bustling street is right next to Patong Beach and surrounded by restaurants, cafes, bars, and nightclubs.

Waking down this street is like an explosion of colour, with neon lights and colourful shopfronts crowding your line of vision.

Your senses may feel like they're on a roller coaster, with the pumping music of clubs mixing with the aromas of street food and the visual chaos.

Bangla Road is pedestrian-only, so you don't need to worry about vehicle traffic while exploring.

From the live music and street performers to the beer gardens and cocktail bars to the street vendors and restaurants, Bangla Road has everything you need for a fun night out in Phuket.

- **20) Surf the Waves**

Thailand is not one of the world's most popular surfing destinations, but travellers can still catch a few fun waves along the Thai coast.

Phuket has lots of good surfing beaches, all of them on the island's west coast which picks up more swell.

The rainy season (May through October) is the best time to surf as the currents can be a bit strong during the high season (November through April).

Surfers of every level can find suitable waves in Phuket, including first-timers who want to take lessons.

The best beaches for beginners are Patong Beach, Kata Beach, and Bang Tao Beach, all of which have surf schools and board rentals available.

Intermediate surfers should head to Nai Harn Beach, Kata Noi Beach, Kamala Beach, or Laem Singh Beach.

These beaches pick up a bit more swell and have faster waves that suit more experienced surfers. Advanced surfers looking for a challenge can surf the reef breaks at Kalim Beach and Nai Yang Beach.

Beginner surfers are not recommended to surf reef breaks as the conditions are a bit more dangerous.

Stick to the sandy beach breaks and you'll have an easy, enjoyable time on the water.

- **21) Visit the Jui Tui Shrine**

Over 90% of the Thai population practices Buddhism, though there are religious minorities of Hinduism and some Chinese religions scattered throughout the country.

Phuket has quite a few Chinese immigrants and their Chinese religions are commemorated in various temples and shrines around the island.

One of the most popular and highly respected Chinese religious monuments is the Jui Tui Shrine. Built in 1911, the Jui Tui Shrine complex has lots of different buildings and courtyards, most adorned with bright colours and images or statues of Chinese gods.

Phuket's annual vegetarian festival is held here every October.

- **22) Attend a Simon Cabaret Show**

For a fun night of music and entertainment, head to the Simon Cabaret.

Established in 1991, Simon Cabaret has become one of the most popular entertainment venues in all of Thailand.

The Ladyboy shows are the most famous, where the local ladyboys put on a spectacular performance with elaborate costumes, impressive singing and dancing, captivating sets and a lively atmosphere.

The one-hour shows are even appropriate for families, and you can take photos with the fabulous performers afterwards.

- **23) Watch the sunset from Promthep Cape**

The Promthep Cape viewpoint on the southern tip of Phuket Island offers some of the best views for sunset.

Though it can get pretty crowded, it is worth coming up to Promthep Cape in the evening to watch the sunset over the ocean.

There is also a Lighthouse Museum, a mini-market selling food and snacks and a few restaurants.

Check the sunset time before you come to Promthep Cape, as the exact times change often and the sunsets are usually very quick.

But catching the view of the warm sun melting over the gorgeous ocean is one of the most magical things to see in Phuket, so definitely make a trip up here at least once during your stay.

Chiang Mai: Jungle Paradise

With the best restaurant and cafe scene in the country, excellent nightlife, a strong Buddhist presence and enough activities to fill a calendar year, there is definitely no shortage of things to do in Chiang Mai!

- *The Best Things to Do in Chiang Mai!*

- **1) Visit Elephant Nature Park**

Unfortunately, Thailand has a history of animal abuse to help boost its tourism economy. Activities such as riding an elephant or visiting the sedated tigers in many of the temples only add to this cruelty and should be avoided at all costs.

But in Chiang Mai, there is one sanctuary that is committed to education and rehabilitation.

Elephant Nature Park is a rescue centre for elephants that have been abused by the tourism industry over the decades.

Here you can either visit the elephants in their natural environment or volunteer at Elephant Nature Park to help out around the sanctuary.

Riding elephants are prohibited; instead, the focus is on treating and protecting these beautiful creatures. Definitely one of the best things to do in Chiang Mai.

Elephant Nature Park is also the most expensive option for visiting elephants in Chiang Mai, but that's because they are the absolute best company in town.

- **2) Enjoy the Cafe Scene**

Ok, we admit it – we're suckers for a city with a great cafe scene. And in Thailand few places offer the kind of coffee-hopping joys that Chiang Mai does.

Because we work online, we love a good cafe with tasty coffee, a comfortable setting, funky music and fast wifi.

After a huge morning seeking out all the Chiang Mai attractions, we'd often find ourselves in one of the quirky cafes to while away the afternoon hours.

Our favourites were Good Morning Chiang Mai and Bird's Nest Cafe, but you could spend weeks bouncing from place to place and never get sick of it.

The cafes really are the bomb and one of the best things to do in Chiang Mai.

- **3) Ride the Mae Hong Son Loop**

Ok, this isn't exactly in Chiang Mai, but no trip to Northern Thailand would be complete without renting a scooter or motorbike and riding this incredible four-day loop.

Starting from Chiang Mai, you complete a circuit, spending nights in Mae Sariang, Mae Hong Son and seeking out the beauty in Pai, before returning back to the city.

It is known to be one of the best motorbike loops in Southeast Asia, 15'000km around the region, we can honestly agree that it is well worth doing.

There's a lot to see and do along the way, and first up is the sensational mountain scenery. Make sure your travel cameras are charged because it's seriously going to blow your mind.

There are also a lot of cool detours you can take that will take you up to some unique hill tribes. The people up there are very friendly and welcoming, but make sure you are dressed modestly and show them respect.

And if the temperature is getting the better of you, there are plenty of gorgeous waterfalls to stop off at and take a quick dip.

The Mae Hong Son Loop is probably up there with Chiang Rai as being one of the best trips from Chiang Mai. Many travelers hit up Chiang Rai afterwards, but save time for the Mae Hong Son Loop, you certainly won't regret it!

- **4) Spend Time With A Local**

When you're in the country you will no doubt have countless incredible interactions that will help convince you Thailand may just be the best country in the world.

If you're in the city and on a limited schedule, there are plenty of things to do with locals in Chiang Mai, such as trekking and a Thai cooking class.

- **5) Explore The Buddhist Temples**

Chiang Mai is full of amazing Buddhist temples, known as 'wats', and the majority of them are open to visitors. While Wat Phra That Doi Suthep is probably the most beautiful, the ones in the city should not be missed either.

Even if you don't consider yourself spiritual, Chiang Mai's temples are a must-see.

Definitely check out Wat Phra Singh, Wat Pan Tao, Wat Chedi Luang, and Wat Umong. One of the real unique things to do in Chiang Mai is to attend a monk chat.

Basically, this is where you can visit a temple and talk to the monks about Buddhism, life in the temples, or just about anything you can think of.

They are often very excited to practice their English, so it is mutually beneficial. Check out the posters plastered around the temples to see when the regular monk chats are on.

- **6) Hill Tribe Trekking in the Surrounding Mountains**

A lot of people who visit Thailand start in the Southern islands, which are undoubtedly beautiful, but can lack a bit of culture and authenticity.

It is no wonder then that when people arrive in Chiang Mai, they are often craving to learn about the history and ethnic development of the country.

Chiang Mai's jungles are a trekker's paradise, filled with waterfalls, valleys, mountains and, perhaps more interestingly, various hill tribes.

Just make sure you sign up for your treks with a reputable and responsible tour operator, where the majority of the money will go to the local people of northern Thailand.

Avoid visiting the Karen long neck tribes.

These minority people have been forced to continue their paralysing traditions, at the insistence of the government, to keep growing the booming tourism economy.

Trekking at Doi Suthep Mountain is really cool.

- **7) Wander the Sunday Walking Street Markets**

Every Sunday night the centre of the Old City is closed to traffic, and food vendors, craftspeople and artists take over with their unique and bargain-priced street markets.

The night street markets are among the most popular of Chiang Mai's tourist attractions.

It's a wonderful evening out, and you'll find locals and tourists alike wandering around, checking out the items for sale and just enjoying themselves.

If you're looking to buy any souvenirs or trinkets this is the place to do it. You'll find all kinds of things here, from traditional to contemporary, and usually at very good prices.

- **8) Visit San Kamphaeng Hot Springs**

Renowned for its therapeutic and relaxing qualities, the San Kamphaeng Hot Springs offers visitors a rejuvenating experience amidst serene surroundings.

It's one of the best tourist destinations near Chiang Mai!

Visitors can immerse themselves in a series of hot mineral pools while enjoying the picturesque surroundings of tropical gardens.

Additionally, the site offers recreational activities such as egg-boiling in the natural hot springs and exploring the nearby Mae On Cave. With its tranquil ambiance and healing waters, San Kamphaeng Hot Springs offers a lovely day of relaxation and natural therapy.

- **9) Do a Meditation Course at Wat Doi Suthep**

Chiang Mai is full of ways to get in touch with your inner self, but perhaps the most famous one is the Doi Suthep Vipassana Meditation Centre. Situated on top of Suthep Mountain, this temple receives thousands of visitors every single day.

For those that want to stay longer and learn more about this life-changing method of meditation, the monks open their doors and provide courses that range from 3-28 days.

Speaking is forbidden during your time in the temple, and all your energies are focused on breathing and clearing your mind of thoughts and troubles.

- **10) Get a Thai Massage at the Chiang Mai Women's Correctional Institution**

That's right – get a Thai massage at the women's prison. Before you turn your nose up at this idea, it is important to realise that this is actually a wonderful and hugely beneficial enterprise.

The women in this correctional facility are all serving short sentences for minor offences, and this is a way for them to learn a new skill to help them migrate back into society.

There's a cafe and crafts store on site, and the massages and spa facilities are very reasonably priced (expect 180 Baht for a massage). One of the strangest, but more interesting, things to do in Chiang Mai.

- **11) Cliff Diving at the Hang Dong Rock Quarry**

If jumping off of high things into water sounds like your idea of fun (it is for us), then make sure you head out to the Hang Dong Rock Quarry in northern Thailand.

Originally used as a mine to clear out limestone, the quarry has now filled with water that glows a vibrant turquoise green. The massive pool is deep enough to launch from the highest cliffs, some of them up to 12m high.

If you would rather take a dip without taking the dive, there are plenty of spots you can just swim out.

It can be hard to find, so hiring a scooter or songthaew is the best way to get there. The spot is also sometimes called Chiang Mai Grand Canyon.

- **12) Get A Sak Yant From a Monk**

If you're done with Chiang Mai sightseeing and you'd like to commemorate your northern Thailand adventure – get a sak yant.

If you've ever wanted to get a bamboo tattoo, then Chiang Mai is the place to do it. Luckily there's an incredible way to have this experience too.

A sak yant is a traditional, sacred tattoo in the Buddhist religion that is performed by an Ajarn, or tattoo master.

These Ajarns are often Buddhist monks, and the sak yants given are ancient script and designs that offer protection and strength to the person wearing it.

Getting a sak yant is often something many travellers want to do on their trip around Thailand, but finding a clean and hygienic place to do it can be tough.

*Sign up for a sak yant tour with *Where Sidewalks End* and even get an English-speaking guide to help translate the entire experience for us with the monk.*

- **13) Go Shopping at the Night Bazaar**

The night bazaar in Chiang Mai is an absolute must for anyone who wants to dive into the myriad options for gifts and trinkets from Chiang Mai as well as various practical items for travellers.

Koh Samui: The Chill Island

Located in the Gulf of Thailand, Koh Samui is a huge island covered in forest and fringed with pristine beaches. As the second-largest Thai island, you absolutely must plan to visit Koh Samui.:

- *The Best Things to Do in Koh Samui, Thailand*

- **1) Book a Tour to Ang Thong National Marine Park**

This is easily one of the best things to do in Koh Samui, and in the whole Gulf of Thailand.

Ang Thong National Marine Park is an archipelago of 42 islands, each one rugged and unique.

Throughout the park you can find limestone cliffs, rocky caves, thick jungle, lakes and rivers, waterfalls, coral reefs, lagoons, hiking trails and sandy beaches, all connected by the vibrant blue ocean.

Highlights in the park include the Emerald Lake, or “Thale Nai”, a green saltwater lake in the midst of the jungle, Koh Sam Sao, an island with amazing snorkelling, and Koh Mae, an island with a steep hike that leads to a scenic viewpoint.

Luckily, Ang Thong Marine Park is well protected as a national park, so exotic wildlife can thrive and human development never oversteps its boundaries.

Only tour boats that are approved by the government are allowed to enter, so travellers cannot access Ang Thong Marine Park without booking a tour.

- **2) See a Mummified Monk**

Wat Khunaram is a Buddhist temple in Koh Samui famous for its mummified monk.

This sight isn't for the faint-hearted, as it is literally a dead body on display in a glass case. But it is quite fascinating for those who are interested.

Buddhist monk, Luang Pho Daeng, died in 1973 and his body is now a source of wonder for local Thais and Buddhists in the area.

He died while sitting in a meditative position and his corpse is in surprisingly good shape for someone who died over forty years ago.

Be sure to follow proper dress code when visiting any temples in Thailand (no shoulders or knees showing).

Location: Na Mueang, Ko Samui District, Surat Thani 84140

Hours: 7 am to 5 pm, open every day

Cost: Free

- **3) Visit the Big Buddha**

The Big Buddha should definitely have a place on any list of things to see in Koh Samui.

Formally known as Wat Phra Yai, this Buddhist temple complex is located on a small island off of Koh Samui's northeastern coast.

The massive golden Buddha sitting at the top of the temple stairs is 12 meters tall and was built in 1972.

If you're flying into Koh Samui you can sometimes see the giant Buddha from the airplane.

The Wat Phra Yai temple grounds also host a small market with souvenirs, interesting clothes and religious ornaments on sale.

Location: Big Buddha Beach, off Route 4171, Bophut

Hours: Open all day, every day

Cost: Free

- **4) Indulge in a Thai Massage**

Though the massage isn't as relaxing as traditional massages, it is supposed to rejuvenate the body and feel amazing afterwards.

Trained Thai masseuses bend and twist your body into odd positions during a massage, and this gets the blood flowing and soothes as well as strengthens your muscles.

There are plenty of spas all over Koh Samui, so check them out if you feel like treating yourself.

- **5) Try Stand Up Paddleboarding**

Though the massage isn't as relaxing as traditional massages, it is supposed to rejuvenate the body and feel amazing afterwards.

Trained Thai masseuses bend and twist your body into odd positions during a massage, and this gets the blood flowing and soothes as well as strengthens your muscles.

There are plenty of spas all over Koh Samui, so check them out if you feel like treating yourself.

Paddleboards are heavy and sturdy, so they are easy to balance on even if it's your first time.

This is a great way to soak in the views and spend quality time with the ocean, and it is a family-friendly activity as well.

Try paddling at sunrise or sunset to beat the heat and see the sky's natural colours dancing above the water.

- **6) Laze Away on one of Koh Samui's Beautiful Beaches**

You simply can't visit Koh Samui without visiting a few of the island's picturesque beaches.

Chaweng Beach is the most popular place on the island, with tons of Koh Samui attractions and nightlife surrounding the beach.

So if you're wondering what to do in Koh Samui, hit Chaweng Beach first, then figure the rest out from there.

Lamai Beach is the second most popular beach, and but it is less crowded and much more relaxing than Chaweng Beach.

Coral Cove Beach is lovely for snorkelling and is hidden in a small bay behind a hotel.

Choeng Mon Beach is located on the north of the island near the Big Buddha, and there are lots of nice hotels and beach bars up here.

Lipa Noi Beach is the most kid-friendly of Koh Samui's beaches, as it has shallow, clear water and barely any coral or rocks.

Pretty much every beach here has velvety white sand and coconut palm trees providing shade, and the water is clear and refreshing everywhere too.

So pick any beach on Koh Samui and you'll feel like you're in paradise

- **7) Explore the Secret Buddha Garden**

The Secret Buddha Garden is one of the most interesting Koh Samui attractions.

Back in 1976, a local farmer named Nim Thongsuk began creating a garden by setting up statues around his land.

Years later, the statues of Buddhas, other deities, animals and random creatures have taken over and the lush jungle gardens provide a nice background to all the artwork.

Spend an hour strolling through the peaceful green forest and admiring all the interesting statues; there is a sense of mystery here at the Secret Buddha Garden that is intriguing.

Some adventure tours around Koh Samui stop at the Secret Buddha Garden as part of their itinerary, though you can also drive on your own.

Even though it is called the SECRET Buddha Garden, this beautiful place has become one of the most famous Koh Samui attractions.

- **8) Taste Local Food at the Chaweng Night Market**

For some of the best street food in Koh Samui, head to the Chaweng Night Market.

This is one of the busiest areas on the island, so the market is full of things to see and is packed every night with locals and tourists alike.

Sample flavorful local snacks for insanely cheap prices, or even get a full meal for less than 2 USD.

- **9) Visit Wat Plai Laem**

Another one of the best Koh Samui attractions is Wat Plai Laem, a Buddhist temple on the northeast coast of the island.

The temple is famous for its statue of Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy and Compassion. Bathed in white and sporting 18 arms, the Guanyin statue towers over the temple grounds and the surrounding lake.

Wat Plai Laem is close to the Big Buddha, so you can easily stop by both during your Koh Samui sightseeing.

- **10) Hike to the Hilltop Temple, Khao Hua Jook Chedi**

For a bit of exercise and panoramic views, visit Koh Samui's hilltop temple known as Khao Hua Jook Chedi.

You'll have to drive or take a taxi to Khao Hua Jook Chedi as there is no public transport running directly to this attraction.

The mountain on which the temple lies is called Chom Daow Mountain, and there is a shimmering gold pagoda as well as statues and Buddhist artworks in the temple complex.

The viewing platform provides a wonderful view over Chaweng Lake, so make sure to bring your camera to Khao Hua Jook Chedi.

Location: Bo Put, Ko Samui District, Surat Thani 84320

Hours: 8 am to 5 pm, open every day

Cost: Free

- **11) Cool Down at the Na Muang Waterfalls**

These two waterfalls are some of the best natural sights in Koh Samui.

They are located only a five-minute drive away from each other and they are both incredibly picturesque.

Na Muang Waterfall One is super easy to access because you can basically drive right up to the entrance.

And it has a wide natural pool that is perfect for swimming (especially during the rainy season).

Getting to Waterfall Two requires a little climbing, so wear sturdy, waterproof shoes.

The thick jungle provides gorgeous natural scenery, and the view from the top of Waterfall Two is quite famous among backpackers.

Location: Off Route 4169, Na Mueang, Ko Samui District, Surat Thani 84140

Hours: 9 am to 5:30 pm, open every day

Cost: Waterfall One has no entrance fee, Waterfall Two costs 30 Baht. You also have to pay for parking at Waterfall Two, 20 Baht for scooters and 60 Baht for cars.

- **12) See the Mysterious Hin Ta and Hin Yai Rocks**

Of all the things to do in Koh Samui, this is probably the oddest.

Set on a rocky beach on the island's southeast coast, the Hin Ta and Hin Yai Rocks are famous because they resemble male and female genitalia.

They are also called the Grandfather's and Grandmother's Rocks, and there are a few local myths about how the rocks came to be.

Whether you are interested in the stories behind the landmarks or not, the nearby beaches are beautiful so it is worth stopping at Hin Ta and Hin Yai Rocks.

- **13) Check out the Guan Yu Shrine**

Symbolic of the Chinese culture that has spread throughout Thailand, the Guan Yu Shrine is a powerful landmark in Koh Samui.

There is a 16-meter high statue of Guan Yu, the Chinese God of War and a symbol of courage, loyalty, and bravery.

You probably won't find too many other tourists here, so you can enjoy a little bit of peace and quiet while reading about the shrine's history.

If you want to continue your education about Chinese culture after visiting the statue, there are some local Chinese restaurants out front.

Location: 190/1 Moo 1, Tambon Maret, Koh Samui, Surat Thani 84310

Hours: 8 am to 5 pm, open every day

Cost: Free

- **14) Attend a Ladyboy Cabaret**

One of the best things to do in Koh Samui, or anywhere in Thailand, is going to a ladyboy cabaret. The local Thai ladyboys are men that change their appearance to look like glamorous women, and they often put on amazing performances around the country.

Koh Samui's best location for watching a dazzling ladyboy performance is the Paris Follies Cabaret in Chaweng Beach.

There are three shows every night here, and different dances and songs from all over the world are incorporated into the sets.

So for a night full of song, dance, and charisma, go to the Paris Follies Cabaret and prepare to be entertained by Koh Samui's best ladyboys.

Location: 166/92 Moo 2, off Chaweng Beach Road

Hours: Performances at 8 pm, 9:30 pm and 11 pm, every night.

Cost: Free entry, but you are expected to buy a drink at the bar which can be over 200 Baht

- **15) Stroll Through the Fisherman's Village Walking Street Market**

Bophut is an area on the northern coast of Koh Samui known for its local fisherman's village.

The village is one of the oldest areas of the island, with rustic old buildings and charming local culture.

Every Friday night starting at 5 pm, Bophut Beach Road turns into a lively walking street market full of souvenirs, artwork, street food, and live music.

- **16) Hike the Elephant Rock near Lamai Beach**

Those looking for active things to do in Koh Samui can head to the Elephant Rock, located between Chaweng and Lamai Beach.

This massive rock formation is named "Elephant Rock" simply because it looks like a giant boulder the same size as an Asian Elephant.

You can climb Elephant Rock to get a great aerial view of the surrounding ocean and beaches.

This is a nice outdoorsy activity to do while hanging out near Chaweng or Lamai Beach; just make sure you wear sturdy hiking shoes.

- **17) Watch a Muay Thai Boxing Match**

Koh Samui's best place to watch a Muay Thai boxing match is Chaweng Boxing Stadium, which is also the oldest stadium on the island.

Here you can observe the talented local athletes as they engage in combat, the techniques and tricks of which evolved from the ancient fighting methods of the Siamese Empire.

Chaweng Boxing Stadium even has a program where they take youths off the streets and train them to fight Muay Thai in a safe and secure place.

- **18) Take a Thai Cooking Class**

The food is definitely one of the highlights of travelling through Thailand.

Thai food is so full of flavour and fresh ingredients, and every meal feels like an adventure for your taste buds.

The local cuisine differs slightly depending on which region of Thailand you are in.

So if you're a true foodie you may want to take a few different Thai cooking classes throughout the country.

Koh Samui has lots of cooking schools that offer full-day tours cooking classes, most of which include a tour of the local market followed by guided instructions for making classic dishes.

This one though is the highest rated, so make sure you book it ahead of time.

The food you prepare yourself may be some of the best you eat in Thailand.

So dedicate at least one day in Koh Samui to a fun Thai cooking class.

- **19) Marvel at Laem Sor Pagoda**

Another one of Koh Samui's best landmarks, Laem Sor Pagoda is located on a quiet beach far from the popular tourist areas.

Down in the southwest corner of the island, the Laem Sor Pagoda stands tall as part of the Wat Laem Sor temple complex.

The Pagoda appears to be fully coated in gold, though it is actually tiny yellow tiles that give it that glowing appearance.

Near the pagoda is a small forest with a lake and picnic benches, as well as another Pagoda called Khao Chedi, located atop a hill that offers panoramic views.

So there are a few things to do down in this corner of the island, and this area makes a nice escape from the more crowded, touristy parts of Koh Samui.

Location: Off Route 4170, past Bang Kao village on a small beach

Hours: Open all day, every day

Cost: Free

- **20) Go Diving or Snorkeling**

The Gulf of Thailand is known for some of the best snorkelling and diving in Southeast Asia.

The waters are crystal clear and the wildlife is colourful and active.

Koh Samui has a few nice snorkelling spots, but the best locations for snorkelling or diving are next to other nearby islands like Koh Tao and Koh Phangan.

Your best option is to book a day tour through a local tourism company, so they can take you around the best snorkelling spots by speedboat.

Koh Tao and Koh Nangyuan are two popular sights for snorkelling or scuba diving, and they can easily be reached by speedboat from Koh Samui.

Experienced certified divers can explore the waters deeply and swim down through coral reefs.

Whereas other travellers can opt for snorkelling, which doesn't require any certifications and is a bit easier.

- **21) Watch the Sunset from the West Side of the Island**

Tropical islands offer some of the most majestic sunsets.

Nothing says makes a vacation memorable like watching the sky change colours as the sun slowly slips behind the horizon, with the waves crashing and the palm trees swaying in the breeze.

Some of the best beaches to go watch the sunset are Lipa Noi Beach, Taling Ngam Beach or Nathon Town Beach.

They are all located on the island's west coast so they face the setting sun.

This side of the island is also far less touristy than the east side, so you'll most likely have the beach to yourself except for a few locals.

On a similar note, head to any beach on the east side of the island for a spectacular sunrise view!

- **22) Try a Fruit Carving Class**

If you've ever been to any sort of fancy hotel or restaurant in Thailand, you may have seen incredible art displays made entirely out of fruit.

The art of fruit carving is a traditional Thai skill that originated in the decoration of events for the Thai royal family.

Fruit carving is more accessible these days, but it is still considered a respectable skill. You can take a fruit carving class at the Intercontinental where professionals will teach you how to carve beautiful designs into fruit and vegetables.

Understanding essential travel information such as visa requirements, safety measures, and health precautions is crucial for a hassle-free and safe Thai trip:

Visas, Safety Measures, and Health Precautions

Visa Information

- South African citizens do not need a tourist visa when travelling to Thailand. Thailand Visa free is free for South African citizens. With this tourist visa stay is usually short with a period of 30 days.
- Thailand tourist visa requirements for South African citizens Documents required for Thailand tourist visa from South Africa include passport and other supporting documents. A total of 3 documents are required.
- **1:** Passport Original Passport of South Africa with at least 6 months remaining validity on the date of travel and have at least 2 visa pages clear of any markings.
- **2:** Travel itinerary Travel itinerary (travel reservation to and from South Africa in your name, not a ticket) Embassy recommends not to purchase hotel and flight tickets until

visa is approved. So don't risk your money, time and effort by buying actual tickets. Get the best hotel and flight itinerary within minutes for any country visa. Get Itinerary

- **3: Proof of Funds** Proof of enough money for your stay and to leave Thailand How to apply for Thailand tourist visa from South Africa Thailand visa free process for South African citizens is straightforward and simple. By following these 4 steps and carrying the necessary documents, South African citizens can expect a hassle-free arrival and entry into Thailand. It is important to note that the immigration authorities have the right to request additional documentation or information as they see fit. Travelers are advised to have all required documents and information ready for presentation to the immigration officers upon arrival in Thailand.
- **1: Valid passport:** Check that your South Africa passport is valid for at least six months from the date of your arrival in Thailand. If not, apply for a new South African passport.
- **2: Arrival:** After arriving, South African citizens can go to the Thailand immigration counter.
- **3: Submit documents:** Upon arrival in Thailand, present a South Africa passport or Travel document to the immigration officer at the counter.
- **4: Receive visa:** You will receive a Thailand visa stamp in your passport, which allows you to stay in Thailand for the 30 days on your stamping.

The visa requirements are different for many countries; some nationalities do not need visas for a stay of less than 30 days, some nationalities can obtain their visas when they arrive at the airport, and some nationalities must obtain a visa in advance.

Always check the visa requirements for your country to make sure you are allowed to enter Thailand!

Pack For Hot, Humid Weather

The weather in Thailand is hot and humid. That's just a fact when considering Thailand travel tips. Unless you are in higher altitudes where the temperature drops a bit, pack plenty of lightweight, breathable warm weather clothes.

Even if you're in northern, mountainous destinations like Chiang Mai, still prepare for heat and humidity.

If you're wondering the best time to visit Thailand for weather, you'll encounter this hot weather year-round. July, August, and September have the most rain, but they are the best time to visit Thailand on a budget!

Prepare to Pay with Cash

Paying with cash is much more convenient than paying with a card around Thailand.

Street markets, local restaurants, and many tourist attractions usually only accept cash as payment, but luckily ATMs are frequent in touristy areas.

Make sure you alert your bank that you'll be travelling so they don't assume your transactions around Thailand are a fraud.

Verify Companies' Legitimacy Before Booking

Before booking any hostels, guesthouses, volunteer programs, or tours, read customer reviews to make sure it is legitimate.

The rise in tourism in Thailand has unfortunately led to a rise in scams and illegitimate businesses that try to get money out of tourists.

Cultural Tips for Thailand

Here are some other travel tips for Thailand that relate specifically to the beautiful Thai culture.

Remove Your Shoes

Feet are considered the dirtiest part of the body in Thai culture.

You'll have to remove your shoes whenever you enter temples, people's homes, spas, and other establishments, so wear shoes that are easy to slip on and off.

Avoid Touching Other People's Heads

The head is considered the holiest part of the body, so you should never touch someone's head. It seems unlikely that you would touch someone's head anyway, but just be aware that it is seen as disrespectful so try to avoid that.

Dress Respectfully

When entering temples, you have to abide by the dress code.

In addition to removing your shoes, you have to wear clothes that cover your knees, shoulders, chest and stomach.

There is no strict dress code for everyday life, but Thais do tend to dress modestly.

Respect their way of life by covering up a bit more.

You are perfectly fine wearing shorts and T-shirts when it is hot out, just try to hide areas like cleavage and the midriff so you seem a bit more aware of Thai modesty.

Ask Before Photographing People

Before taking a photo of someone, ask for their permission.

If you see a local wearing a traditional garment or a monk praying in a temple, this can be a beautiful image to capture.

Thais are usually very friendly, so if you ask for a photo they will most likely oblige.

If you need more help with this, check out our guide to travel photography tips for beginners.

A photogenic Thai girl posing for a photo.

Respect the King

Thais love their king. You'll find posters, monuments, emblems, and other displays of affection with the king's face plastered on them.

All that this means for travellers is to respect monarchy and never say anything negative or offensive about the king.

Learn to Love the Ladyboys

Be prepared to see lots of ladyboys...or not see them.

Ladyboys are Thai men who dress up as women, and sometimes they do it so well that you would never even notice the difference.

You can attend a cabaret show to see the ladyboys performing their hearts out, or you can just wander through the streets of Bangkok or Chiang Mai and try to spot them in the crowds.

Bargain with Dignity

Bargaining for goods at street markets is a huge part of travelling to Thailand.

Definitely give it a try, but always be respectful and don't bargain too low.

See what the original price is, and slowly try to lower the cost.

Generally speaking, half of the original price is as low as you should go. Anything lower than that may offend the vendor.

If you are buying something handmade or truly unique and special, just pay the full price as your money will benefit the local artist and community.

Health Precautions

HEALTH PRECAUTIONS TO TAKE IN THAILAND PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST

MOSQUITOES Mosquitoes present a risk of contamination with diseases more or less annoying (dengue and malaria in particular and Zika also

DON'T DRINK TAP WATER Not even if the same ice in tourist areas are generally made with purified water (one recognizes them to their cylindrical shapes with a hole in the middle but this form is not an absolute guarantee of their purity). Buy and consume water in sealed bottles. Can also be used for brushing teeth. If you think you venture into very remote areas, take with you tablets to purify water (ask your pharmacist).

- **WATCH STRAY DOGS** They often carry rabies.

GO TO THAILAND WITH A GOOD TRAVEL INSURANCE Before going on a trip to Thailand or elsewhere, it is imperative to check your travel insurance cover. Your Visa or Mastercard often contains travel insurance but it is often insufficient, so you must check. This is important because every year, there are tragedies of uninsured people who are victims of accidents and their families cannot afford the medical expenses.

Vaccinations: Check with healthcare providers for recommended vaccinations before traveling to Thailand.

- **Medical Facilities:** Locate reputable hospitals or clinics and consider travel insurance that covers medical emergencies.

Respecting Thai etiquette, learning basic phrases, and appreciating the country's religious and cultural practices fosters a deeper connection with the locals and enhances the overall travel experience in Thailand.

When to go:

The best time to visit Thailand is between November and March when the weather is cool and dry. This is also the peak tourist season, so prices for hotels and flights may be higher. March offers the lowest rates for accommodation and airfares. May to October is a good time to enjoy low rates, but it is also the rainy season. The climate varies throughout the country, so you can visit all year round.

Understanding Thailand's climate seasons helps plan a trip to make the most of favourable weather conditions and avoid travel inconveniences during the wet season.

Recommended Hotel Brands:

Options from Luxury to Budget-Friendly

- **Luxury Escapes**
- **Boutique Hotels and Villas**

Boutique accommodations combine charm and comfort, often reflecting Thailand's cultural essence.

Mid-Range Comfort

Budget-friendly yet comfortable options are plentiful across Thailand.

Hostels and Shared Accommodations

Perfect for solo travelers or those seeking a communal atmosphere:

When choosing accommodation in Thailand, consider factors such as location, facilities, and your preferred atmosphere. Whether you seek luxury, cultural immersion, or budget-friendly comfort, Thailand caters to diverse tastes, promising a memorable stay amidst its tropical beauty.

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Accor Hotels

Hilton Hotels

Centara Hotels

Marriott Hotels and Resorts

Radisson Blu Hotels

IHG Hotels