

OVERSEAS

Haven Report



Bangkok, Thailand:
The City Of Angels...



Bangkok: The City Of Angels

By Wendy Justice

We've been to Bangkok many times. You really can't avoid it if you live in Southeast Asia, nor is there a reason to. It's one of the largest and most cosmopolitan cities in the world. Bangkok is often the first stop that foreigners make when coming to the Far East. It's a major transportation hub, and provides easy connections to most major Asian destinations. Of course, Bangkok is a destination in its own right, too.

The first time we came to Bangkok, in 2003, we came as tourists. It was our first stop during our very first trip to Southeast Asia. We saw the Grand Palace, some of the fantastic Buddhist temples, took a long-tailed boat out on the Chao Phraya River, and visited

the floating markets. While making our way between these sites, we found that the city was difficult to navigate. Public transportation was nearly nonexistent then, and we were at the mercy of *tuk-tuk* and taxi drivers who tried their best to extort every last Thai baht out of us—they had an uncanny ability to know that we were first-time visitors and saw us as easy prey. It was all very new to us.

We've come to Bangkok many times since then, and we've watched it develop into a sleek and modern city. The infrastructure has improved immeasurably since 2003. A recently constructed, state-of-the-art public transportation system has made it much easier to get around.

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Live and Invest
OVERSEAS



Novices at the Chao Phraya River

There are now plenty of five-star hotels and restaurants that provide top-end luxury. Art galleries, philharmonic orchestras, and luxury spas offer alternatives to seedy go-go bars, backpacker ghettos, and “happy ending” massage parlors.



Benjasiri Park - Relaxing in the Evening

Bangkok is a city that has something for everybody, which explains why more expatriates live here than in any other city in Southeast Asia.

Bangkok has a population of roughly eight million people, and about 25% of them are citizens from other countries. The majority of Bangkok expatriates come from the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Germany, Australia, and Japan. About

50,000 U.S. citizens live in Bangkok and make up about a third of the population of foreigners who hail from western countries. The majority of western foreigners teach English or hold other employment, though there is a sizeable population of retirees living in Bangkok, as well.

Why Bangkok?



Street Eats

To experience what Bangkok has to offer, you need to spend some time here. Your first impressions may be that Bangkok is a huge, sprawling city with a few major tourist attractions, a lot of bars, and a decent food scene. As you stay longer, though, your perception of Bangkok will likely change. You'll appreciate the ease of obtaining a long-stay retirement visa and the low cost of living. You'll find that relatively cheap rent, bargain street food,] and inexpensive transportation are definite benefits to living here. If you don't mind living simply, you can get by on a monthly budget of well under US\$1,000 per month. If you can manage a budget of US\$3,000 per month, you'll be living like royalty.

Resources for foreigners living in Bangkok are excellent. There are many venues where expats gather, both formally and informally. Magazines such as TimeOut Bangkok and Sukhumvit Scene offer extensive listings of restaurants, festivals, concerts, and events around town. Internet resources such as ThaiVisa provide a huge array of timely, local information.

Medical care in Bangkok is outstanding. Internationally-accredited hospitals and clinics provide state-of-the-art care at prices that are just a fraction of the cost of western health care. Year-round warm weather, dozens of golf courses, and

easy access to some of the best beaches in Thailand provide further incentives for retirees.



Streetside in Silom

Most foreigners live in the Sukhumvit-Phloenchit area, Silom, or Sathorn, though some foreigners choose to live in the suburbs where life is quieter and the cost of living is less. Unless you speak Thai, you'll probably want to settle down in an area with a large number of expats.



Lumpini Park—come and sit a spell

We've learned that it takes time to appreciate Bangkok, but it's time well spent. As we've become more comfortable getting around the city's different neighborhoods, talking with long-term foreign residents, and seeing the city from the perspective of an expat, rather than a tourist, we've discovered a city that is growing, developing, friendly, and vibrant. We have come to appreciate why so many people have made Bangkok their first stop in Southeast Asia and decided to settle here permanently.

Kings And Coups

In the early 15th century, Bangkok was just a small village. It was a part of the Ayutthaya Kingdom, which stretched from the central plains of Thailand all the way south to Malaysia.

The Ayutthaya Kingdom welcomed foreign traders, and Bangkok, due to its strategic location near the mouth of the Chao Phraya River, served as a customs outpost.

During the 17th century, the French made themselves unwelcome among the Thai people due to their efforts to exert control over the kingdom. In 1688, the Siege of Bangkok marked the end of French attempts at occupation. A force of 40,000 troops successfully besieged the main French fortress and the 200 troops who were stationed there. After a four month blockade, the surviving French soldiers were permitted to leave the country, and the Ayutthaya kingdom cautiously agreed to allow a few missionaries to remain.

Following the defeat of the French, Siam (as Thailand was known at the time) entered a long period in which they were suspicious of any intervention from Western countries. Trade with Europe decreased significantly.



The ruins of Ayutthaya

The Ayutthaya kingdom fell to the Burmese Empire in 1767. General Somdet Phra Chao Taksin then overthrew the Burmese and was declared king. He made Bangkok his new capital city and the base of the Thonburi Kingdom. In 1782, General Phutthayotfa Chulalok deposed Taksin in a coup. He moved the capital to a new location on Rattanakosin Island near the eastern bank of the Chao Phraya River and was declared king. To commemorate the founding of the

city, he erected the City Pillar, which still stands opposite the Grand Palace in central Bangkok. Many Thais consider the City Pillar the living spiritual heart of the city.

By the mid-19th century, Bangkok's economy had expanded due to increased international trade with merchants from China and the West. Most citizens of Bangkok were living on or near the water, with many living on bamboo rafts either on the Chao Phraya River or along one of the many canals in the city. The only stone structures during that period were Buddhist temples and royal palaces. Gradually, many of the canals were filled in and replaced by roads, and Bangkok's residents began to expand onto the plains.

By the early 20th century, Bangkok had modernized. Siam abolished its absolute monarchy in 1932 and transitioned to a democratic government. As a result, Bangkok became the focal point for power struggles between the country's political and military elite—a conflict that has persisted to the present day.

World War II was a difficult time for all of Southeast Asia. The Japanese occupation caused widespread misery, starvation, and death throughout the region. Following four years of occupation in which tens of thousands of people died, the Japanese surrendered.



Traffic is not too bad today

Bangkok grew rapidly after the war, due to government-sponsored investment and additional developmental aid provided by the United States. Bangkok became a popular rest and relaxation destination for American GIs

during the war with Vietnam and Laos, as well as a popular destination for sex tourism. The population of Bangkok swelled rapidly during this time, doubling in size in less than two decades.

Rapid urbanization brought growing pains to the city. Infrastructure was lacking, resulting in inadequate roads and horrific traffic jams. A lack of comprehensive city planning left Bangkok with the dubious distinction of having the fewest number of parks and the least amount of green space of any capital city in the world.

Hordes of struggling farmers continued to pour into the city, and the gap between the poor and the wealthy widened. Not surprisingly, political unrest followed. There were student uprisings which resulted in a military dictatorship being imposed on October 14, 1973 in what was called "The Day of Great Sorrow."

Although the country technically became a democracy again after the 1973 coup, it was an uneasy transition and was followed by another uprising in 1976. At least 46 demonstrators were killed, many more wounded, and more than 1,000 arrested during the Thammasat University massacre. The new government had alienated almost everybody in Thailand, and was toppled by another coup and change in leadership in 1977. In 1992, the Black May protest overthrew yet another Thai leader at the cost of at least 52 deaths and the arrest of 3,500 Thais.

Still, Bangkok's population grew. It wasn't until the 1997 Asian financial crisis that Bangkok's growth took a temporary breather.

More coup d'états have occurred in Thailand than in any other country in the world. Since 1932, there have been 11 successful coups and another 7 attempted coups. The most recent successful coup was in 2014, resulting in a change of government from Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra to a military junta headed by General Prayut Chan-o-cha. The military regime has promised a return to a democratic government, and a general election may occur by February 2016.

Despite its political challenges, Bangkok has become one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Asia. New subway and light rail lines have helped ease pollution and

transportation congestion, and further expansion is planned. Large boulevards lead to glittery new malls, top quality restaurants, and throbbing nightlife.



Wat Phra Kaew—the temple of the emerald Buddha

Elsewhere in Bangkok, life continues at a much slower pace, much as it did centuries ago. Vendors selling fruits, vegetables and household goods from little rowboats continue to supply residents who live in simple wood and bamboo houses along the waterways. Stunning palaces and glittering, golden temples still serve as Bangkok's spiritual hub, quietly enduring political instabilities and bridging the ancient and modern worlds.

The name Bangkok is actually a western nickname. The original village that was called Bangkok centuries ago no longer exists. Modern Bangkok's proper Thai name is *Krung thep mahanakhon amorn ratanakosin mahintharayuthaya mahadilok popnoparat ratchathani burirom udomratchanivetmahasathan amornpiman avatarnsathit sakkathattiyavisnukarmprasit*, which, according to the Guinness Book of Records, is the longest location name in the world. In English, this translates into "The city of angels, the great city, the residence of the Emerald Buddha, the impregnable city of Ayutthaya of God Indra, the grand capital of the world endowed with nine precious gems, the happy city, abounding in an enormous Royal Palace that resembles the heavenly abode where reigns the reincarnated god, a city given by Indra and built by Vishnukarn." Thais simply refer to Bangkok as *Krung Thep*, or the "City of Angels."

On The Level

The city of Bangkok sits nearly at sea level in the Chao Phraya River delta in the central plains of Thailand. The river

meanders throughout the city as it makes its way into the Gulf of Thailand, just 25 kilometers (16 miles) from the city center.

Bangkok is 1,518 kilometers (941 miles) north of the equator. It is the capital of Thailand and the largest city in the country. The Bangkok metropolitan area has a population of more than 10.5 million, which makes it the second largest city in Southeast Asia.



Lotus in the wetlands

Bangkok was once swampland. During the 16th to 19th centuries, an extensive canal system was constructed to provide irrigation for agriculture. In Bangkok's early days, most people lived on or near the canals and the city was known as the "Venice of the East." These canals are still used today as a common means of transportation, an alternative to Bangkok's notoriously congested roads.



Homes on the canals of Bangkok

Large volumes of water have been drawn from the underlying aquifers to support Bangkok's growing population. Over the years, there has been a gradual sinking (subsidence) of the city. Today, many parts of Bangkok lie a full meter below

sea level. This has resulted in increased flooding and fears that if the subsidence continues, much of Bangkok could be submerged by 2030.

There are no hills or mountains in the metropolitan area other than Phu Khao Thong. This is a manmade hill on the grounds of the Buddhist temple Wat Saket, where a 58 meter (190 foot) bell shaped *chedi* tower known as the Golden Mount was built in the 18th century. The nearest mountains are about 40 kilometers (25 miles) southeast of the city in Chonburi Province.

Bangkok's Sights And Sounds

There is an abundance of activities in Bangkok. Whether you want to take in a philharmonic performance, relax in a park, watch the latest Hollywood blockbuster, get in touch with your spiritual side, take a class, or see what's new at one of several English-language libraries, there is always something to do.

Read A Good Book

The Neilson Hays Library, located in Silom, has one of the largest English-language lending libraries in Southeast Asia. The library stocks more than 20,000 English-language books in a lovely colonial-style wooden building. It houses an art gallery and café in addition to its extensive magazine and book collections. Annual membership fees, which start at 5,000 baht for families, 2,500 baht for single adults, and 1,500 baht for seniors age 65 and older, are used to support the library's expanding collections.



Neilson Hays library

The American University Alumni Library, or AUA, features an extensive collection of books in English and Thai, in addition to periodicals, reference materials, video and audio collections, an educational counseling service, and language classes.

Some of the larger public libraries in Bangkok also have English-language selections. Alternately, there are new and used English-language book stores located throughout the city.

Film And Cinema

Film lovers will be spoiled for choice in Bangkok. **The Alliance Française** offers foreign and independent films on a regular basis, in addition to having a library and multimedia space, an auditorium, a café, and a French bookstore. They also host occasional performances, concerts, and conferences. The Goethe Institute is another venue for independent films. These films are generally in German with English subtitles.

To see what concerts, movies and special events are happening around town, check out the entertainment portal Thaiticket Major. Almost every mall has a multi-screen cinema that shows mainstream Hollywood, Bollywood, and Thai films. Hollywood movies playing at the local cinema will be in English with Thai subtitles.

The Bangkok Symphony Orchestra, Siam Philharmonic Orchestra, Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Bangkok Opera all offer regularly scheduled concerts.

Visual Arts



Lumpini park - youthful spirit

There are more than 50 art galleries in Bangkok, as well as the huge Bangkok Art and Cultural Center. Bangkok's Museum of Contemporary Art also has a large collection of paintings and sculptures from renowned Thai artists. The Bangkok Art Map, which is available at the MBK Mall and other venues throughout the city, shows the location of the various galleries and gives information concerning the exhibitions that are happening around town.

If you're building or renovating your Bangkok home or just want an introduction to Bangkok's thriving art scene, you'll definitely want to visit the Thailand Creative Design Center. Located on the seventh floor of the Emporium shopping complex on Sukhumvit Road, the TCDC has a large selection of design books, a quiet workspace, and free wireless Internet. It is frequented by the *dek neaw* crowd—Bangkok artists who come to the TCDC for inspiration and networking. You'll need to pay a small fee for daily use or purchase an annual membership. They also have an art space, café and library on site.

A Day In The Park

Although Bangkok lacks the number of parks found in many Asian cities, there are a few that are popular with locals and foreigners alike.



Lumpini park - perfect spot for a picnic

Lumpini, located in Silom, is the largest park in central Bangkok. With a lake big enough for paddle boats, wide lawns, and cooling shade trees, this park is a great place to spend a lazy afternoon. Jogging and bicycle paths, exercise parks, tennis and volleyball courts, and evening aerobics classes are popular activities.

Benjasiri Park, in Sukhumvit, also has a lake, benches, and an exercise track. The park comes alive at sunset when the basketball and tennis courts fill up and aerobics classes are offered for anyone interested in a work-out. There is also a public swimming pool on the grounds.



Benjasiri park - evening aerobics class

The largest park in the Bangkok metropolitan area is Chatuchak Park, which is located close to the Chatuchak Weekend Market. It is easily accessed by the BTS and MRT lines. A train museum and an artificial lake, complete with several bridges, are the highlights here.

Pulsating Nightlife

Bangkok has been a hotspot for nightlife since the war in Vietnam and Laos, and many of the bars and nightclubs that became popular with GIs stationed in Southeast Asia during the 1960s and early 1970s are still in operation. Venues for adult-only entertainment are clustered into three main areas—Patpong, in Silom, and Soi Cowboy and Nana Plaza, both in the Sukhumvit part of town. Adventurous adults of both sexes might enjoy sampling the many burlesques, cabarets, go-go bars, and ladyboy shows that take place every day of the year.



Nana plaza - Bangkok's notorious adult playground

For a more conventional evening, Bangkok has an overabundance of fine restaurants, pubs, and bars—as nice and as varied as you would expect to find in any major city. The best ones are concentrated in the Sukumvit and Silom districts. Restaurants serving cuisines from around the world are plentiful and most of them are moderately priced.



No lack of western favorites

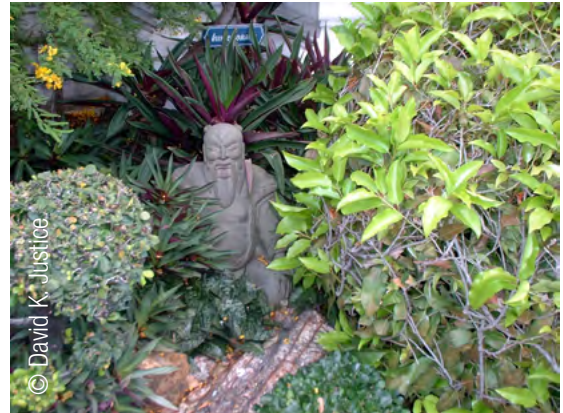
Go To The Beach

Although Bangkok is not situated on a beach, it enjoys easy access to some of the better beaches on the Thai mainland. Major beach towns in the immediate area include the retirement havens of Cha-am, Hua Hin, and Pattaya. All of these seaside resort areas are easily accessible as a day trip from the city. Pattaya is infamous for its adult-oriented nightlife and sex tourism scene, while the clean, welcoming coastlines of Cha-am and Hua Hin are family friendly and graced with more than a dozen golf courses.



Hua Hin - Bangkok's beach and golf getaway

Get In Touch With Your Spiritual Side



Garden guardian at the wat

One of the highlights of Bangkok is visiting the splendid Buddhist temples, or *wats*. They offer an opportunity to enjoy tranquility among well-maintained grounds adorned with distinctive, intricate architecture, statues, shade trees, and benches. At night, the grounds of many *wats* will turn into food courts, where inexpensive Thai dishes are prepared fresh to order.



Wat Arun - the temple of dawn

The grandest wat of all is Wat Phra Kaew, also known as the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Located within the grounds of the Grand Palace, Wat Phra Kaew houses a highly revered Buddha image carved from a single block of jade. This is the most visited Buddhist temple in the country. Other magnificent temples include Wat Arun, Wat Pho and Wat Saket. Several of the wats in Bangkok offer classes taught in English on meditation and Thai massage.

An LGBT Hot Spot

Bangkok is famous for being an LGBT-friendly city. There are many establishments that cater to the LGBT community. Many of these venues are in areas that also see many foreigners, such as the Sukhumvit and Silom-Patpong neighborhoods and the area around Lumpini Park.

Bangkok is well-known for its large transgender population. More than 5,000 transgender individuals, who are referred to as *katoeys*, *kathoeys* or ladyboys, live in the city. They are generally accepted by Thais as a third gender.

There are no laws in Thailand that prohibit homosexual behavior, though same-sex marriages are not recognized. Open displays of affection, whether homosexual or heterosexual, are frowned upon by conservative Thais.

The Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand is a community-based organization that provides medical help, social services, and support for LGBT people. The website Utopia has a great deal of information about LGBT-friendly businesses and hotspots in Bangkok and throughout Thailand.

Leave The Snow Shovel Behind

According to the World Meteorological Organization, Bangkok is one of the hottest cities in the world. Since it is located just 14 degrees north of the Equator, seasonal variations in temperature are minimal. Temperatures rarely dip below the low 20s C (low 70s F) at night or exceed 38°C (100°F) during the day. The highest recorded temperature in Bangkok was 40°C (104°F) in 1979, and the lowest temperature was a chilly 9.9°C (49.8°F) in 1955.

Bangkok Climate Averages

Seasonal variations impact precipitation much more than temperature. November through February are cool, relatively dry months. Things heat up considerably during March and April before the monsoon rains come to cool things down

A Golfer's Paradise

Bangkok's warm, tropical weather lends itself well to golf. With more than 40 golf courses around the city, your hardest task will be choosing which one to visit.

The Royal Bangkok Sports Club is the only golf course located right in the heart of Bangkok. This 18-hole, par-66 course features a variety of sand traps and water hazards. Designed by Chohei Miyasawa, the links of the Royal Bangkok Sports Club preserve the beauty of the natural environment. There are shade trees, undulating fairways, and canals separating the holes. The area surrounding the fairways is owned by some of Thailand's most elite residents. This exclusive course is open only to members.

The 18-hole, par-72 Alpine Golf Club was designed by Ron M. Garl. The 7,100 yard championship layout is set among grass-covered hills and hundreds of hand-picked trees. The Alpine Golf Club has been the site of several world-class tournaments, including the 2000 and 2004 Johnnie Walker Classics. It is widely considered to be one of the best golf courses in the Bangkok region. The club is located about an hour's drive from the city center. Fees for non-members, including a cart and caddy, range from about 4,000 baht on weekdays to around 5,500 baht on weekends.

The Thai Country Club has been voted the Best Course in Asia by *Asian Golf Monthly magazine*. Designed by Denis Griffiths, the well-maintained par-72 course was the site of the 1997 Asian Honda Classic won by Tiger Woods. Green fees range from 3,650 baht on weekdays (4,850 baht on weekends and holidays) from April to October to 6,500 baht in the afternoon during the high season (November through March).

The Lam Luk Ka Country Club has two 18-hole, par-72 courses that meander through the wetlands near Bangkok. This internationally acclaimed 1,200 acre venue was designed by Roger Packard. Fees are 1,800 baht on weekdays and 2,600 baht on weekends. There are additional caddy fees of 350 baht and a cart fee of 700 baht. Discounts are offered to golfers age 55 and older.

The Subhapseuk Golf Club is another popular golf course in the Bangkok metropolitan area. This 18-hole, par-72 course is fairly flat and many holes are shorter than those at other top-end courses, which makes this a good course for a leisurely game. Prices are 3,900 baht on weekdays and 4,800 baht on weekends. They also have a driving range.

Thana City Golf and Sport Club, designed by the legendary golf pro Greg Norman, has an abundance of hazards and several long holes. Streams and lakes dissect the course. Fees for non-members start at 2,500 baht on weekdays and 4,000 baht on weekends. Frequent promotions are offered that can bring the Green fees down to around 1,000 baht.

The Navatanee Golf Course is an exclusive course built in 1973 to host the 23rd World Cup of Golf. The 18-hole, par-72 course was designed by the renowned golf architect Robert Trent Jones Jr. This international-standard course was ranked as one of the top courses on the Southeast Asian mainland by *Golf Digest USA*. Green fees are 4,200 baht for 18 holes, including caddy and cart. Navatanee is located less than a 45 minute drive from central Bangkok.

There are many more golf courses in the greater Bangkok metropolitan area, especially around the seaside resorts and expat havens of Cha-am, Hua Hin and Pattaya.

again. The wet season runs from May through October. Sudden, fierce thunderstorms are common. Rains often occur in the afternoon and stop within a couple of hours, providing a pleasant but short-lived cooling effect. The rainy season peaks during September and October. Flooding, which has occasionally been severe, is most likely during this period.

Month	Average Maximum Temperature		Average Minimum Temperature		Average Rainfall	
	°C	°F	°C	°F	mm	inches
January	32.5	90.5	22.6	72.7	13.3	0.524
February	33.3	91.9	24.4	75.9	20	0.787
March	34.3	93.7	25.9	78.6	42.1	1.657
April	35.4	95.7	26.9	80.4	91.4	3.598
May	34.4	93.9	26.3	79.3	247.7	9.752
June	33.6	92.5	26.1	79	157.1	6.185
July	33.2	91.8	25.7	78.3	175.1	6.894
August	32.9	91.2	25.5	77.9	219.3	8.634
September	32.8	91	25.0	77	334.3	13.161
October	32.6	90.7	24.8	76.6	292.1	11.5
November	32.4	90.3	23.9	75	49.5	1.949
December	31.7	89.1	22	71.6	6.3	0.248
Year	33.3	91.9	24.9	76.8	1,648.2	64.889

Frequent rains help to moderate the air pollution, which can be fairly significant during the dry season. The city government is actively fighting pollution through the introduction of energy-efficient mass transit, the introduction of gasohol, and natural gas fuelled buses. As a result, pollution levels have been steadily decreasing over the years, and the air quality here is now better than that of many other Asian cities. When the smog is heavy, Bangkok residents tend to flock to the cleaner air in nearby Cha-am and Hua Hin.



Eco-friendly bike share

Finding Your New Home

It is easier to find a place to live in Bangkok than it can be in many other cities.

Serviced Apartments

There are scores of small apartment buildings that rent out studio and one or two bedroom units by the day, week, month, or year. These fully furnished serviced apartments are ideal for people who are just moving to the area.



Short term serviced apartments are a good place to start

These apartments have kitchenettes with basic cooking equipment and utensils, towels and linens, and televisions. Most places also provide regularly scheduled housekeeping. Many buildings have a washing machine on site, 24-hour security, and may even provide free rides to the main road. Some also have amenities such as swimming pools, gyms, restaurants, or clubhouses. On a longer term lease—generally monthly or longer—most places charge separately for electricity and water, though cable television and wireless Internet are usually included in the rate.

Most of Bangkok is laid out on a grid, with major commercial roads that are intersected by small streets, or *sois*. The *sois* will have residential houses and apartments, as well as a few neighborhood shops and restaurants. If you take a walk down any of the *sois* along Sukhumvit Road, for example, you'll see plenty of apartments advertising vacancies. Often, the prices will be displayed; if not, you can ask the receptionist, as no advance appointment is required.



Expats Living on the Soi

Hotels

Alternately, many hotels in Bangkok will also rent out their rooms on a weekly or monthly basis, with prices discounted significantly from their posted daily rates. However, it is not usually possible to find a hotel room that includes a kitchenette.

Standard Apartments And Condos



Plenty of nice rentals available

If you want to live a less transient lifestyle and rent a condominium or apartment, you'll probably benefit from the assistance of a property agent. A good agent will work hard to find a place that you like, as their income—which comes from the property owner—is dependent upon renting the property. Property agents are used to working with foreigners and can usually communicate well in English. Agents are also in a good position to negotiate terms with the property owner. The cost of the agent's fee is generally added into the rent. However, the service that they provide can make that extra expense worth it.

You can also find a place to live by word-of-mouth, browsing the classifieds of the English-language newspapers, or searching the *sois* looking for signs.

What To Expect

One-bedroom apartment rentals in the expat-friendly neighborhoods of Bangkok start at around 10,000 baht per month; spacious two-bedroom apartments in well-located buildings start at around 20,000 baht per month.



Secure luxury living on the Soi

The typical rental agreement in Bangkok is for one year. If you are willing to sign a longer lease, you can often negotiate a better price. Normally, when you find a place to rent, you'll need to make a deposit equivalent to one or two month's rent.

Many rental units come fully furnished. Besides the basics, units typically will have a microwave oven, a television, a washing machine, pots and pans, dishes and other housewares, and will often include bedding. Unfurnished apartments are also available and generally cost less.

In most cases, you'll have the utilities in your name and will be responsible for paying them. The monthly utility bill can be deducted automatically from your Thai bank account if you have one. Some owners will include Internet access and cable television in their rental fee or will keep these utilities in their name.

A Place To Call Your Own

We recommend living in Bangkok for several months or even longer before committing to the purchase of a unit.

This will give you ample time to explore the city, experience the seasons, and get a feel for daily life. Since rents tend to be very reasonable, there is no pressing reason to buy a condominium.

Most foreigners who purchase property in Bangkok end up in a condominium instead of a house. Purchasing a condominium gives you a title and full legal rights to the property. There are scores of real estate companies doing business in Bangkok, and there are also some very good online resources available where you can browse through current condo listings. [See the Rolodex](#) for a sampling of Bangkok realtors.



Hyde Sukhumvit luxury condo interior

Despite having one of the lowest costs per-square-meter for residential property of any major city in Asia, buying a condominium in Bangkok does not always constitute a wise investment. Thais overwhelmingly prefer buying new units as opposed to previously owned ones, and unless a building is located in a prime area, your investment will depreciate over time. Many newer units offered for lease bring in low rental income returns, too. New buildings that are very near the BTS and MRT lines offer the greatest resale potential as well as the best rental property yields. Some newer buildings to consider include the

Icon Siam, Hyde Sukhumvit, and Grande Asset Hotels & Property developments.

Foreigners are not permitted to own land in Thailand, so buying a house—which is not practical in Bangkok anyway—requires obtaining a long-term lease on the property with a separate title of ownership for the house itself.

Setting Up The Necessities

Bangkok offers everything you need to live a very comfortable life. Internet is fast, reliable, and affordable. Telephone service is excellent whether you decide to have a landline, a mobile phone, or both. Banks are stable and foreigner-friendly, and if you are living here under Thailand's long-stay retirement visa, it is easy to open an account. Grocery stores stock everything you could possibly need including a wide selection of imported goods. Bangkok has some of the largest and sleekest malls in the world—perfect for shopaholics.

Fast, Dependable Internet



Mobile coverage is excellent in Bangkok

Several companies provide Internet service, including the popular 3BB and True Move, as well as the national telecommunications provider, TOT Public Company. Plan to spend between 590 and 1,200 baht per month for fast ADSL Internet access, depending on the plan you select and the promotions that are currently available. These same telecommunication companies offer both prepaid and postpaid mobile phone plans.

Owning Thai Property

The most common way for a foreigner to become a property holder in Thailand is through the purchase of a freehold condominium. Thai law requires that the funds used to purchase a condominium originate from abroad. The foreign currency used to make the purchase must be recorded by a Thai bank on a Foreign Exchange Transaction Form. The percentage of foreign-owned units in a condominium block cannot exceed 49%.

When you purchase a condominium, you'll have to come up with cash for the full purchase price—mortgages are not available. It may be possible to make installment payments directly to a developer while the building is being constructed, but when the work is completed, full payment will be expected.

The majority of condominium developments in Bangkok are sold under freehold status, and from an investment point of view, this is decidedly to the buyers advantage.

Homes And Land

A foreigner in Thailand has the right to use land, but cannot own it. However, you can lease land for the purpose of building a home. Once you have leased the land, you are then free to construct a house on the property.

Unlike many parts of Thailand, few foreigners choose to buy houses in Bangkok. From an investment perspective, it is not particularly lucrative, as Thais prefer to purchase new homes rather than homes that have been previously occupied. As a result, if a house is not ideally located, it will depreciate over time. This is true for condominiums, as well. While condominiums may be owned free-and-clear and may be in prime locations, free-standing houses owned by foreigners are generally not as well located and will not increase in value due to the leasehold status of the land.

Some parts of the city, notably around Siam Center, are owned by the Thai Royal Family, and houses and condominiums in that area are sold with a leasehold, rather than freehold, status. With a leasehold, you own the property for the duration of the lease and any lease extensions. At the end of that period, the property reverts to the property owner from whom you originally made the purchase.

The initial 30-year leasehold contract is guaranteed under Thai law. Further contracts between a seller and a leasehold buyer can be complex and must separate ownership of the house from the land. A contract may include additional 30-year extensions, which are referred to as prepaid hire periods. They are generally stipulated separately from the initial 30-year lease. If you eventually decide to sell your home, the purchaser has the option of buying a brand-new 30-year lease under the same terms as the original contract.

Because of the legal complexities of leasing land and buying real estate, it is essential to utilize the services of a reputable Thai-based attorney. Sales agreements are written in Thai.

Taxes And Fees

Taxes and fees from the purchase or sale of property are paid at the time of the transaction. These taxes include a transfer fee which is assessed at 2% of the value of the property, and a stamp duty of 0.5% which may be paid by either the buyer or the seller. There is a Specific Building Tax (SBT) of 3.3% based on the selling or assessed price (whichever is higher) when a property is sold less than five years after purchase. If the property has been owned for more than five years, the SBT is 0.5%.

Additionally, when you sell a property as an individual, you will be charged a withholding tax on the income earned as a result of the sale. This tax may range between 0% and 37%, depending on how long the property was owned. The tax is calculated from Thailand's progressive tax rate and based on the income generated by the sale.

Taxes On Leasehold Properties

If you're leasing a condominium or land, there is a one-off stamp duty that is assessed at 1 baht per 1,000 baht of the lease fee for the entire lease period. Though there are no property taxes for freehold properties, if you have purchased a leasehold unit, you will have to pay a 2.5% annual property tax.

Taxes On Business Or Commercial Properties

If you are buying or selling a business or commercial property, there is a 1% tax based on the appraised value of the property or the selling price, whichever is higher. This tax must be paid by the seller.

Reliable Telephone And Cable TV

Although the majority of Thais use mobile phones, TOT service provider does offer land lines. Rates are about 100 baht a month plus a few baht for each local call.

The three largest providers of mobile phone service are AIS, TRUE, and DTAC, though there are several smaller carriers, as well. Rates are very competitive, with packages starting at just 99 baht per month. Plans that include unlimited data are available for less than 600 baht per month.

True Visions Cable TV is Bangkok's main cable provider. They offer several plans, including the Super Family HD package, with 136 channels featuring a large selection of movie and sports channels for just 899 baht per month.

Utilities

You'll have no problem getting water and electric service. If you have a Thai bank account, the monthly charges are automatically deducted through direct debit. There are no extra deposits charged to foreigners. Electricity is quite reliable and it is rare for power outages to occur.



Dependable utilities

Although tap water is considered safe enough to drink, most residents buy bottled or purified water. Drinking water is available in any grocery store or convenience mart, and filtered water can be purchased directly out of machines if you have your own container. If you go to a restaurant, iced drinks are safe to consume.

Banking

If you make a deposit to qualify for the long-term retirement visa (see sidebar Stay A While In The Land Of Smiles), you must open a Thai bank account. This is not a requirement if your visa qualification is based upon your pension, but having a bank account here is still a good strategy. Banks in Thailand are stable and opening an account is easy once you have obtained legal residency. You may need to enlist the assistance of a Thai speaker when opening a bank account, though most major banks will have at least one employee with adequate English skills.

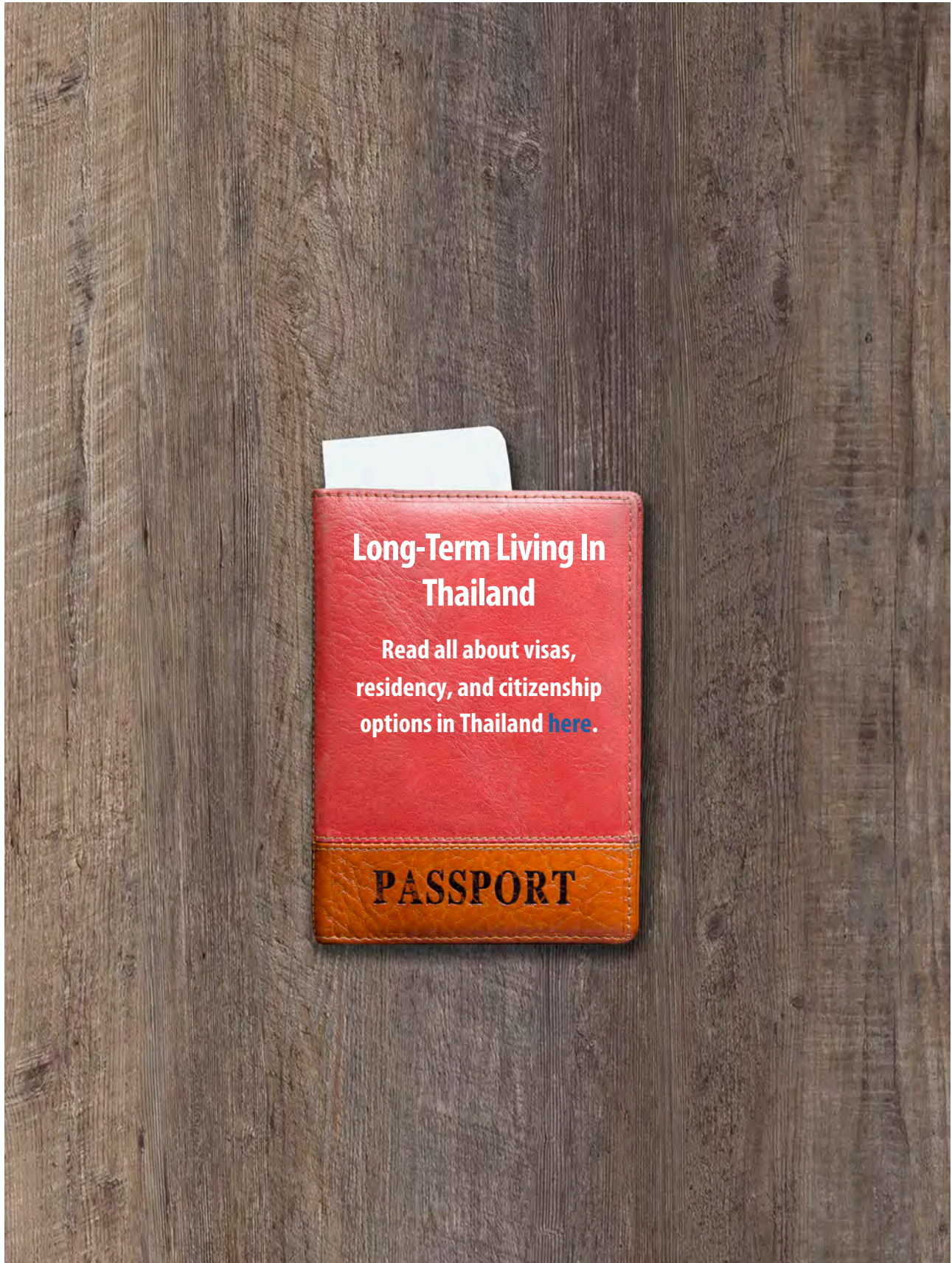
ATMs are located throughout the city. Most ATMs will charge a fee of 150 baht to non-bank customers who make cash withdrawals from their machines. If you have a brokerage-based debit card such as those offered by Fidelity or Charles Schwab, you may be able to get this fee reimbursed. If you have an account with a local bank, making cash withdrawals from their ATMs is generally free.

Shopping For Groceries



Modern and well stocked supermarkets

Bangkok has a huge variety of grocery stores and most of them have a full selection of local and imported items. Tops has several stores in Sukhumvit, Silom and throughout



Stay A While In The Land Of Smiles

Short Stays

When arriving at any international border entry in Thailand, citizens of the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Italy, Germany, Japan, and France will be given a 30-day social visit stamp as they pass through customs and immigration. Citizens from most other countries will be granted a social visit stamp that is valid for only 15 days, if entering Thailand by land, or a 30-day stamp if arriving by air. It is possible to get one 30-day extension on a social visit stamp through the Thai Immigration office. The price for an extension is 1,900 baht.

Obtaining a single-entry or multiple-entry tourist visa will allow you to stay in the country for 60 days. This visa must be issued by a Thai consulate or embassy prior to entering the country. The usual fee for a tourist visa is US\$40.

It is possible to extend this visa an additional 30 days from an immigration office within Thailand for 1,900 baht. The maximum time that you can remain in Thailand with a tourist visa is 90 days within any 6-month period if you have a single-entry 60-day tourist visa, or 120 days if you have a 60-day multiple entry visa. You must be able to provide proof onward travel that is within 30 days of your initial entry into the country.

Bangkok. Tesco has outlets in Silom. Expat-friendly Villa Market, which stocks many hard-to-find imported items, has several stores in Sukhumvit, Silom and elsewhere in greater Bangkok. The upscale Dean & DeLuca also has a store in Silom. Gourmet Market has three Sukhumvit stores as well as one at the Siam Paragon mall.



Expat-oriented gourmet market

Fantastic Malls And Markets



Traditional performer in modern mall

Sukhumvit is quickly becoming the “go to” part of town for malls. Terminal 21 is one of Bangkok’s newest trendy malls. The Emporium, which is full of upscale shops, is currently being expanded to about twice its original size, and the Gateway Ekamai is also in that same neighborhood. Currently, however, the hub for shopping is still centered around Siam Square, near the National Stadium in central Bangkok. Ultra-modern and upscale malls in this area include Central World, which is the largest mall in Bangkok and the sixth largest mall

in the world, the Siam Paragon, which is the world's 40th largest mall, and the cavernous MBK Mall, which has more than 2,700 shops.

If you want to shop in a somewhat more traditional manner, it's worth a making the trip to the Chatuchak Weekend Market. This market, which encompasses more than 27 acres, has more than 15,000 booths. You can buy nearly anything here. The Chatuchak Weekend Market is one of the largest weekend markets in the world. It is easily accessed by either the BTS or MRT.



Chatuchak weekend market - mardener's delight

There are several floating markets along Bangkok's canals and on the Chao Phraya River. Vendors sell local sweets, staples, and exotic tropical fruits from simple rowboats. These markets are great places for photographers and sightseers, but they aren't really a practical way to stock your shelves. However, it's still worth checking them out for the experience.

The most popular floating market in Thailand is the Damnoen Saduak, which is located about an hour outside of central Bangkok. It's a perfect place to take some pictures, eat good local food, and gain an insight into a bygone way of life.

The World's Top Destination For Medical Tourism

More tourists come to Thailand for medical care than any other country in the world. There are 40 hospitals and clinics in the country that have received Joint Commission International (JCI) accreditation, and 25 of those are located in Bangkok. Roughly 40 percent of all physicians practicing medicine in Thailand are located in Bangkok, which gives the city an ample supply of health care providers.

Expats here love to share their stories about the health care that they have received in Thailand. They say that the quality of care is far superior and costs just a fraction of what they would have paid back home. On average, the cost of health care in Thailand is about 20% of what it costs in the United States. Accredited hospitals in Thailand are modern, clean, and fully equipped with the latest technology.

Doctors practicing medicine in Thailand must be certified by the Thai Board of Medicine. Since the Board exam is offered only in Thai, most doctors practicing medicine here are Thai nationals. Many doctors have received at least some of their training abroad and the majority of physicians practicing in private hospitals speak fluent English. Some hospitals also offer foreign exchange programs for their nurses, sending them to Australia, Japan, the U.S., Korea, and elsewhere to learn new techniques and cultural aspects of treating foreign patients.

Top Hospitals



Dental tourism is big in Bangkok

Perhaps the biggest challenge you'll have when seeking medical care in Bangkok is choosing the hospital that you like the best.

Bumrungrad Hospital is the largest private hospital in Bangkok, and one of the first hospitals in Thailand to receive JCI accreditation. Bumrungrad has 580 beds and 30 specialty centers, and has always been one of the expatriate community's favorite hospitals.

Samitivej Hospital in Sukhumvit is a 250-bed hospital that provides a full range of health services, including an innovative pediatric program. Foreigners in Bangkok who have used

House ownership, monthly cost per couple		
HOA Fees	THB9,750	
Property Taxes	0	N/A
Transportation	THB3,000	BTS, MRT, occasional taxis or tuk-tuks
Gas	THB150	Used for cooking
Electricity	THB2,250	Air conditioning, used most nights
Telephone	THB600	Unlimited, including data
Internet	THB590	Unlimited
Cable TV	THB899	
Household Help	THB3,000	Three times weekly (allow THB9,000 if a full-time, live-in maid is required)
Groceries	THB9,000	Local foods, few imported items
Entertainment	THB10,000	Eating out, miscellaneous expenses
TOTAL	36,239	

Apartment rental, monthly cost per couple		
Rent	25,000	Furnished two-bedroom home
Transport	THB3,000	BTS, MRT, occasional taxis or tuk-tuks
Gas	THB150	Used for cooking
Electricity	THB2,250	Air conditioning, used most nights
Water	THBN/A	Included with water
Telephone	THB600	Unlimited, including data
Internet	THB590	Unlimited
Cable TV	THB899	
Groceries	THB9,000	Local foods, few imported items
Entertainment	THB10,000	Eating out, miscellaneous expenses
TOTAL	41,489/51,489	

Penny-Pincher's Budget (for a couple, bare minimum costs for all)				Monthly car-ownership expenses	Monthly motorcycle-ownership expenses
Rent	THB8,000	Furnished 1 bedroom apartment			
Transportation	THB1,500	BTS, MRT, infrequent taxis or tuk-tuks			
Gas	THB150	Used for cooking	Road use taxes	THB 2,000	TBH 300
Electricity	THB1,500	Fan-cooled only	Fuel	THB 600	TBH 200
Water	n/a	Included with electricity	Insurance	THB 645	TBH 324
Telephone	THB99	Prepaid for local calling; Skype for international calls	Maintenance	THB 200	TBH 200
Internet	THB590	Unlimited	TOTAL	THB 3,445	TBH 1,024
Cable TV	THB899				
Groceries	THB7,000	Supermarkets or local markets, no imported foods			
Entertainment	THB4,500	Eating street food 15 days each month, no alcohol			
TOTAL	24,238				

their services speak very highly of Samitivej, citing the personalized care they received as one of the advantages of going to this smaller hospital. Samitivej Hospital has several branches in Bangkok.



Samitivej hospital - their cafeteria is nicer than many restaurants

Bangkok Hospital was the first private hospital in Thailand. It also receives high praise from the foreign community. The Bangkok Hospital group, which owns both Bangkok Hospital and Samitivej Hospital, is the largest health care provider in Thailand, with 13 locations throughout the country. They include specialty hospitals and clinics devoted to cancer, cardiac and pulmonary care, pediatrics, allergies, diabetes and a host of other issues.

Other recommended foreigner-friendly hospitals include the JCI accredited BNH Hospital in Silom and the Praram 9 Hospital in Bangkok's Huai Khwang district.

There is not a single phone number that you can call for emergency medical services in Bangkok. Instead, call your preferred hospital's emergency number and they will dispatch an ambulance. The larger hospitals also offer transport by helicopter, if necessary.

Dental Care In The Land Of Smiles

Whether you are in need of a routine check-up, a complicated dental implant, or just want to brighten your smile, dental clinics in Bangkok offer high quality care at very low prices. All of the major hospitals have dental clinics that can address any dental concern, and private clinics can be found throughout the city. Some dentists even provide free check-ups.

Appointments are generally available within a day or two of the initial request. Cleanings and fillings typically cost less than US\$30, and you'll spend less than US\$300 for most crowns. Prices are often posted right on the clinic website.

No Prescription Required

Most medications available in the west are sold in Thailand, and other than for controlled substances, prescriptions are generally not required. Prices tend to be a fraction of what U.S. residents pay for the exact same drug. If you need to take a specific medication that cannot be substituted, you may want to check first to make sure that drug is available locally.

Challenges For Disabled People

Bangkok is not an easy city to navigate for people with reduced mobility or other disabilities. Wheelchair users will find it difficult to get around the city. Streets and sidewalks are often uneven or obstructed and only a few buildings provide ramps or handrails. There are very few designated handicapped parking spaces anywhere in the city.

The majority of the BTS stations lack elevators or even escalators to accommodate those with mobility impairments. Fortunately, the MRT system offers better access for the disabled, and all MRT stations have elevators. There are seat locks on the MRT trains for wheelchairs.

Bangkok buses lack equipment for disabled people. Suvarnabhumi Airport does not have elevators or disabled toilet facilities, which makes this a difficult airport for the mobility impaired.

A few sidewalks along major roads have raised tiles to assist vision impaired individuals, but these tend to be intermittent and do not exist along side streets and secondary roads. Guide dogs are very rare and there are no audio signals at traffic crossings.

However, the governor of Bangkok has made a commitment to make public transportation more disabled-friendly. There are plans to add elevators at all BTS stations, and make Bangkok's sidewalks more navigable.

Despite the city's shortcomings, there are disabled foreigners who have chosen to make Bangkok their home. Taxis are readily available and affordable, medical care is excellent, and hiring an assistant is quite inexpensive.

There are several organizations in Bangkok dedicated to bringing increased access for those with disabilities, as well as offering support to disabled residents. If you have a disability and are thinking about a move to Bangkok, consider contacting the National Office for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities or Disabled Peoples' International, Asia Pacific Region ([see Rolodex](#)).



Fishsticks - Sukhumvit road

“I Very Enjoy!”—English In Thailand



Bilingual signage is the norm

The Thai language is intelligible if you speak Laotian, but otherwise, it is unrelated to any other modern language. The squiggly Thai alphabet is derived from ancient Khmer (Cambodian) script. Numbers, however, are written European-style. Spoken Thai uses six tones, so words will have different

meanings depending on how you pronounce them. Due to the complicated script and the multiple tones, Thai is considered a difficult language to learn.

For the most part, you'll not have too much difficulty living in Bangkok as an English speaker. Most Thais that you'll come into contact with will have at least a minimal knowledge of English. There are occasions when it may be helpful to have a Thai speaker with you though, such as opening a bank account or getting a Thai driver's license. Since many taxi drivers do not speak English, it can be helpful to show them a business card or address written in Thai script.

You'll likely live in a part of the city that has a relatively large number of fellow expats, such as in Sukhumvit or Silom. Employees working in hotels, restaurants, nightclubs and other venues frequented by foreigners will be able to communicate in English. However, learning a few polite terms and having a working knowledge of numbers will make life easier and earn a few Thai smiles, as well.

Street signs are usually written in both Thai and English. When shopping at a grocery store, most items are labeled in both Thai and English. Although Thai does not use the same alphabet as we use, in reality, it really doesn't make life that difficult if you don't know the language.

The Thai Language Hut, AAA Thai, Walen International and the Thai Language Station are a few of the many schools in Bangkok that offer both group and private lessons. As a bonus, enrolling in classes is an excellent way to get an extended stay visa if you want to live in here but don't qualify for a retirement visa. Most language schools will assist their foreign students in obtaining education visas.

English is a required class for all Thai school children, as well as for anyone attending a university, so the majority of younger people speak at least some English. If you venture beyond Bangkok into the smaller towns and rural areas, it can be difficult to find anyone—except perhaps youngsters—who can converse in English.

The complexities in the syntax and grammar of the Thai language influence the way that many Thais speak and write English. The results, while usually understandable, can be amusing to a native English speaker. Tinglesh, or Thai

colloquial English, takes a bit of getting used to, but you will probably “very enjoy” it once you do.



Beware the sign

There are two nationally distributed English-language newspapers—the Bangkok Post and The Nation. Language need not be a barrier to enjoying life in Thailand.

Getting There Is Easy

The Region’s Busiest Airport

Bangkok’s Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK) is the busiest airport in Southeast Asia. Suvarnabhumi (pronounced “su-wan-na-poom”) is served by all major air carriers, with non-stop flights to and from cities in Asia, Australasia and Europe. Flights originating in the U.S. will require a transfer.

Suvarnabhumi’s single terminal building, which handles both domestic and international flights, is by some measures the largest in the world. More than 45 million passengers flew through BKK last year. Construction which is expected to be completed in 2016 will further expand the airport’s capacity.

BKK is located 30 kilometers (19 miles) east of Bangkok. Getting from the airport into the city is easy by bus, limousine, metered taxi, minivan, or the BTS Skytrain.

A second, older airport, Don Mueang International Airport (DMK), was once one of the busiest airports in the world. Although most major carriers have relocated to the newer Suvarnabhumi Airport, Don Mueang is still a regional hub for several domestic and international budget carriers. It is located about 30 kilometers north of Bangkok’s city center. The trip into the city can be easily accomplished by bus,

limousine, metered taxi, minivan, or train. Airport buses also provide service to the MRT, where you can take rapid transit trains to many destinations in the city.

By Train Or Bus

Bangkok is easily accessible by rail if you’re coming from Singapore, Malaysia or northern Thailand. The trains are comfortable, inexpensive and efficient. You can find complete information about routes, schedules and prices on the excellent website, Seat 61. All long distance trains go to Bangkok’s massive Hualamphong Station. Other than during peak holiday periods, purchasing a train ticket is a simple and hassle-free process. It’s even possible to buy tickets online up to 60 days prior to departure.

Long distance buses are a popular and inexpensive way of getting to Bangkok. Thailand’s roads are good but there is a fairly high accident rate, so trains and planes are a safer way to travel long distances. Bus travel is also subject to traffic congestion, which can add hours to the trip.

Bangkok has three major bus terminals that serve various destinations in Thailand and beyond. With a few transfers, it is a simple, though time-consuming process, to take a bus from practically anywhere in Southeast Asia to Bangkok.

Getting Around Bangkok

Trains, Taxis And Tuk-Tuks



BTS light rail

One of Bangkok’s most notable achievements in recent years has been the construction of a functional and convenient mass transit system.



Thailand's famous tuk-tuks

The BTS light rail line runs along Sukhumvit Road and connects with the MRT subway, which goes through the Silom district. Trains on both lines run every few minutes. They are a fast and economical way of getting around much of the city while avoiding Bangkok's infamous traffic jams. Anyone over the age of 60 can receive a 50% discount on the regular MRT fares, and discount cards for frequent users are available from the BTS, as well. Trains operate from 6:00 AM to midnight. Several new lines are currently being constructed according to a master plan that will feature a total of 508 kilometers (316 miles) of track by 2029.



Bangkok MTA bus

Taking a taxi is often a reasonable alternative to the train. The flag-fall for a metered taxi is just 35 baht, and when the traffic is not too heavy, they are a very affordable and hassle-free way of getting around town. The blue, yellow, or bright pink metered taxis are usually clean and well-maintained. Some drivers will attempt to quote a flat fare rather than using the meter. This never works out to the passenger's advantage, so if the driver refuses to use the meter, it's best to find a different taxi.

Unlike many parts of Thailand, *songthaews*—pick-up trucks that have been converted into mini-buses—are not a common means of transportation in Bangkok, and are rarely used by foreigners. *Tuk-tuks* are colorful, motorized three-wheeled motorbikes that can transport two or more passengers at a time.

They are still used in Bangkok, but their numbers have dwindled in the past few years. Trains and taxis are usually less expensive and infinitely more pleasant than sitting in a *tuk-tuk* that is negotiating heavy traffic through noxious exhaust fumes.



Chao phraya river boat at Wat Arun - the temple of dawn

Bangkok's bus system is operated by the Bangkok Mass Transit Authority. Buses are the least expensive way of getting around, but they are also the most challenging. Buses and the routes they cover are only signed in the Thai language, and even Thais say that the metro bus system is confusing.

Although there are about 230 kilometers (140 miles) of signed bicycle routes in Bangkok, the lanes are often shared with vendors, pedestrians and other obstacles. Other than for the daring, bicycling is not a practical way to get around in the city.

A final way to get around Bangkok's infamous traffic jams is to take the Chao Phraya or Saen Saep Express boats. These are an inexpensive and relaxing way to get from one point along the river to another. The BTS line connects to the Chao Phraya Express Boat dock at the Sathorn Terminal, while the Saen Saep Line is closest to the BTS Ratchathewi station. Boats depart every few minutes from sunrise to sunset. Chao Phraya Express Boat's informative English-

language website has information on routes and fares, and you can read about the Saen Saep Line on their website as well ([see Rolodex](#)). Hiring private long-tail boats is also possible for canal tours and short trips; you'll want to agree on the fare before boarding.



Lumpini park - kindly officer

No Need For A Car

With the expansion of the BTS and MRT lines and the proliferation of metered taxis, many Bangkok residents have discovered that there is really no need to own a car. Massive traffic jams and a confusing network of expressways combine with inattentive, inexperienced, and impatient drivers to make driving in Bangkok difficult. Traffic jams are so common that the Thai Traffic Police has an entire unit of officers who have been trained to deliver babies. When having your own transportation is necessary, it may be cheaper and easier to rent a car as opposed to storing and maintaining your own vehicle.

Duties charged for importing a motor vehicle to Thailand are high. Driving is on the left-hand side of the road. If you are bringing your car from a country that drives on the right-hand side of the road, it will not be properly equipped for driving in Thailand.

If you plan to drive, it is essential to either have a Thai driver's license or an international driver's license. A Thai driver's license is easy to get if you live here under a retirement, education, or employment visa. The police are known to stop foreigners without cause, so make sure that your proper paperwork is in place.

Safety Concerns

Bangkok has a moderately low crime rate when compared to many cities in the U.S., and what crime does occur is seldom violent. The most common crimes in Bangkok are burglaries, motorcycle theft and drug-related incidents.

It's unlikely that you will ever become a crime victim if you use basic common sense. Remember to lock your doors and avoid counting your money in public places. Use caution in crowded subways, busy malls, and around major tourist attractions to avoid pickpockets. Purse-snatching and credit card fraud occur occasionally. If you see a political demonstration, avoid it. That should be all that's needed to prevent problems.



Take comfort - reclining buddha at Wat Pho

The Bangkok police occasionally stalk foreigners, hoping to catch those who don't dispose of their litter appropriately. Tossing a cigarette butt or other litter on the street can result in an on-the-spot fine of 3,000 baht or more. Small infractions of any kind can be expensive and unpleasant. Possession of illegal drugs carries severe penalties in Thailand.

Heavy flooding is uncommon but can have disastrous consequences when it does occur. Floods in 2011 brought parts of the city to a standstill for several weeks and resulted in the loss of more than 800 lives and billions of dollars in damage. The areas where foreigners are likely to live—Sukhumvit, Silom, and Sathorn—are unlikely to be affected.

Is Bangkok For You?

Bangkok has a lot going for it, but there are two potential drawbacks to take into account if you're thinking about

retiring here. Bangkok is big. It's a major city with a population fast approaching ten million people. It takes a bit of effort to get out to the peaceful farmlands, deserted beaches, or quiet, open spaces. Bangkok's tropical climate can also be an issue. Bangkok is considered to be one of the warmest cities in the world, and it is hot and humid year-round.



Is Bangkok for you

If those don't sound like drawbacks to you, then consider the benefits. Bangkok is a truly international city with a very large population of foreigners. Specialty foods and grocery items from all over the world can easily be found here. Whatever you're pining for, you'll have no difficulty satisfying your food whims.

Since there is such a large population of foreigners, there are many activities and services available for expats. Top-quality international schools, libraries, and health care are all easily accessible. Concerts, expat get-togethers, and festivals can

Ask The Author

Later this month, the managing editor of the *ORL*, Kaitlin Yent, will be talking with Wendy Justice about Bangkok during the live, monthly *ORL* teleconference. She'll be asking Wendy questions, sent in by the Overseas Retirement Circle's *ORL* readers, about any subject to do with living in Bangkok. This monthly call provides a great opportunity to really get under the skin of a place and have any thoughts or uncertainties answered, live, by an expert. However, this "Ask The Author" opportunity is only available to [Overseas Retirement Circle](#) members. If you'd like to send your questions in and then join Wendy and Kaitlin on the call, please take a look [here](#) for details on how to upgrade your *ORL* membership to become a member of the [Overseas Retirement Circle](#).

be a part of your daily life, and you'll see other westerners whenever you venture outside. Parts of the city, especially around Sukhumvit and Silom, feel very westernized. Although Thai culture is definitely different than western culture, adjusting to life in Bangkok can be enjoyable and easy.

If you want to visit Bangkok and evaluate it for your new retirement home, plan to spend at least a few weeks here. Your impressions of the city will change over time. Since serviced apartments are so easy to find, you'll have no difficulty setting up a temporary home for a few weeks or months while you make your decision.

You'll find Thai people to be exceptionally pleasant. Thailand is famous for being "the land of smiles," and you'll be impressed with how well Bangkok lives up to that reputation. ■

Bangkok Video Resource

[YouTube Link](#)
[Live and Invest in Bangkok](#)

Expat Interview With Stephen Klein

Bangkok, Thailand

Wendy Justice: Steve, you told me that you had spent quite a bit of time in Bangkok before you made the decision two years ago to live here full-time. What was it about Bangkok that attracted you?

Stephen Klein: The people. I immediately felt comfortable in a country that is very different than the United States. It looked, sounded, smelled, and felt different. And yet the warmth of the people made me feel very comfortable.

WJ: Thailand has always seen large numbers of single foreign men who come here to retire and perhaps get married to a local woman, but recently I've noticed quite a few single foreign women and foreign couples. Do you think that Bangkok has been discovered as a retirement haven for foreigners of both sexes?

SK: Although I've noticed many foreign women here, I don't know if they're single or married... I have seen some women with their husbands or children. Many I've seen are too young to be retired. I've assumed that they were working here. I haven't really seen a lot of older married couples that appeared to be living here, as opposed to being tourists.

WJ: Do you find that there are a wide variety of activities for expats?

SK: Yes I do. There are expat organizations like InterNations that are constantly holding meetings and sponsoring activities. The Thai Visa Forum is a great source of communication between expats.

Taking classes in the Thai language, Thai cooking classes, massage classes, etc., are good ways to meet people. Also, there are many volunteer opportunities.

WJ: What are the best things about living in Bangkok?

SK: It's pretty easy to make friends. It has all the things that a major international city offers at a very low price. Whatever whim you may want to indulge, you can find it here. The food is great—from Thai to Italian, Mexican to American, Indian to Middle Eastern, as well as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean.

It's a short and easy flight to Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

WJ: What don't you like about living in Bangkok?

SK: I'm not fond of the traffic, the noise, the pollution, or the crowds.

WJ: I know that medical care and dental care are a great value in Thailand. Can you comment about any care that you've received here? If you were seriously ill, would you consider returning to the United States for medical care or do you think that the local hospitals are adequate?

SK: The medical care is fantastic here. You can walk into a hospital without an appointment and see a doctor within a half hour. The facilities are spotless and modern, with all the latest equipment.

The doctors all speak English, many of them have been educated in the United States or Europe, and the prices are 20 to 50% of U.S. costs.

For most normal problems and for emergencies I would be fine with the caliber of care here. If I needed elective surgery, I might consider going back to the United States if I couldn't find a surgeon in Thailand who performs that surgery a significant number of times per year.

WJ: Has the language been an issue for you?

SK: Yes and no. In Bangkok, you can get by without speaking Thai. When you get away from the big cities, you need to speak some Thai in order to make life easier. I have not learned Thai, but I plan on starting lessons early next year.

WJ: The Sukhumvit area appears to be growing in leaps and bounds, with new construction in every direction. What is the future of this part of the city? Where is it headed?

SK: The Sukhumvit area, particularly between Soi 1 and Soi 101, is the heart of the upper middle class area frequented by westerners. The BTS (elevated train) runs along Sukhumvit Road and construction of hotels, condos and office buildings along this corridor is booming. I think the future is very bright and the area will continue to prosper over the coming years.

WJ: You said that you don't have the need for owning a car here. Is the public

transportation system adequate? How do you get around?

SK: I live where the BTS and the MRT (subway) cross, so much of the city is available via these systems. Of course, we also have taxis, tuk-tuks, motorcycle taxis, and buses available at very reasonable rates. I only occasionally rent a car when I want to drive out of town to places like Hua Hin or Pattaya or to take a trip up-country.

WJ: What was it like in this part of town during the coup d'état? Did you feel unsafe at any time?


SK: It was interesting. The intersection of Sukhumvit and Asoke Road, right next to where I live, was blocked by demonstrators for close to three months. It was like a giant block party, with people selling souvenirs and

food. There was a stage where rock music was often played during the day. Although some people camped out at the intersection, most showed up late in the day, after work, to hear their leaders speak. I never felt threatened, but followed the wise advice to stay away at night.

WJ: You said that you rent your condo. Have you considered buying a place here? Why or why not?

SK: No, I haven't considered buying a condo here. It is cheaper to rent than to buy in this part of town (therefore not wise to buy as an investment, due to the low return on rentals and the questionable chance for appreciation). Also, I prefer to have the flexibility to move around in Bangkok or to move out of town without worrying about selling.

WJ: If you could offer advice for someone considering moving to Bangkok, what would you tell them?


SK: Come and spend at least a couple of months here. Try to see what it is like for a Westerner to live here not as a tourist. While here, seek out expats and check the various forums. 

Stephen Klein was born in New Haven, CT and has a degree in engineering. He has two grown sons and two grandchildren. After retiring in 2003, Stephen began traveling to South America, Europe and Asia. After visiting Thailand in 2007, he began to spend more time there each year until 2012, when he decided to move to Bangkok full time. He lives with his sweetheart in a very modern condo just off Sukhumvit Road. Since moving to Thailand, he has visited Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam.



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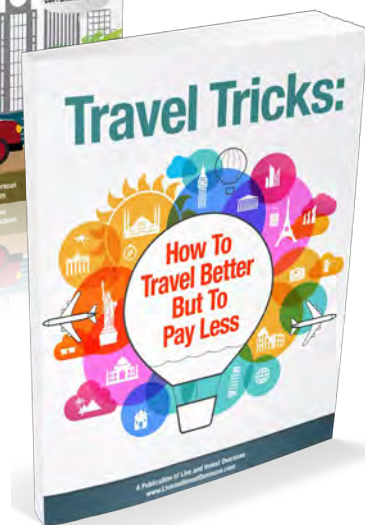


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