

Do's and Don'ts in Thailand

Thais are known for their tolerance and hospitality, and the average tourist will have no difficulty in adjusting to local customs. As in any unfamiliar society, a visitor should, nevertheless, be aware of certain do's and don'ts to avoid offending people unintentionally. Basically, getting along involves good common sense and how one should behave at home. Still, there are a few special tips for travelers to Thailand.

The Monarchy

Thais revere the Royal Family, and visitors should be careful to show respect for His Majesty the King, the Queen and their children. For example, in a movie theater, movie-goers are required to stand up while the royal anthem is played. When attending a public event, at which a member of the Royal Family is present, watch the crowd and do what it does.

Religion

Thai law has special sections on religious offenses covering not only Buddhism, the religion of most Thais, but also other faiths in the Kingdom. Sacrilegious comments, acts and vandalism of religious objects or place of worship are unlawful. It is also unlawful to cause any disturbances at religious congregations or ceremonies.

Here are a few tips on what to do and what not to do when visiting a religious place:

- All Buddha images, large or small, ruined or not, are regarded as sacred. Do not climb on or do anything that would show lack of respect.
- Dress politely and appropriately. Do not go to a temple shirtless or in shorts. Pants are considered unsuitable attire for women visiting a temple. If you have any questions, guides or officials at each temple will provide instructions for appropriate dress and behavior.
- It is acceptable to wear shoes while walking around the compound of a Buddhist temple, but not inside the chapel where the Buddha statue is kept.
- In a Muslim mosque, men should wear hats and women should be well covered with slacks or a long skirt, a long sleeved buttoned-up blouse, and a scarf over the head. Everyone should remove her/his shoes before entering the mosque and should not be present during a religious gathering.
- Buddhist monks are forbidden to touch or be touched by a woman or to directly accept anything from a woman. If a woman wishes to offer something to a monk or novice, she must first hand it to a man who will then present it to the monk. In case a woman wants to present something herself, the monk or novice will spread out a piece of saffron robe or a handkerchief for the woman to place the object on before it can be picked up or handled.

Social Customs: Do's and Don'ts

The don'ts of everyday Thai social behavior are less clearly defined than those concerning the monarchy or religion, especially in Bangkok where western customs are widely accepted. However, what is acceptable in Bangkok may not be the same in the countryside where traditions remain strong and are strictly adhered. Here are few examples:

- Thais do not normally shake hands when they greet each other, but instead press the palms of their hands in a prayer-like gesture called “wai”. Generally, a younger person should wai an older person, who will then return it.
- It is considered rude to use your foot for pointing, especially when pointing at a person. Thais regard their head as the highest part of the body. They do not approve of touching anyone’s head, even in a friendly gesture. At social gatherings, young Thais go to considerable length to keep their head lower than those of their elders' in order to avoid giving the impression of looking down on them. This is not always possible, of course, but it is the effort that counts.
- Public displays of affection between men and women are frowned upon. You may see some young Thai couple holding hands but never kissing in public
- Losing your temper, especially in public, will most likely get you nowhere. Thais see such displays as poor mannerism. You have a greater chance of getting what you want if you keep a cool head and remain polite.

Do not be surprised if you are addressed by your first name, e.g. Mr. Bob or Ms. Mary, instead of your last name. This is because Thais refer to one another in this manner, usually with the title Khun (Mr., Mrs., or Ms.) in front.

Advice to Visitors on Arrival

The following tips are also helpful for arriving tourists.

- Visitors arriving at Don Muang International Airport should use only authorized transportation services from the airport to the city and other areas. Please contact service counter in the arrival greeting area behind customs.
- Those who need help with accommodations should consult the Thai Hotel Association counter in the arrival greeting area.
- Avoid unauthorized people who offer their services as guides. Contact a reliable travel agent for a guide or Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) counter for all tourist information.
- Visitors should consider using taxi services available at most major hotels.
- Observe common sense precautions regarding personal safety and the safety of your belongings. Walking alone in the dark or deserted areas is not recommended. Be sure that all your valuables are protected. Never let your belongings out of sight if possible.
- Travel information is available at the TAT counter in the passenger arrival lounge at terminal 1 (Tel. 523-8972-3), terminal 2 (535-2669), or at the head office on Ratchadamnoen Nok Ave. (282-9775-6), and temporary office on Bumrung Muang Rd. (266-0075-6)
- For assistance with safety, security, or unethical business practices, contact the Tourist Assistance Center in Bangkok at 281-5051 or 282-8129 or the Tourist Police at 255-2964-8 or 255-1699
- Penalties for drug offenses are severe in Thailand. Do not get involved with drugs.

Shopping Advice

A wide variety of local souvenirs are available at reasonable prices in Thailand. For those who do not have much time and do not want to bother bargaining, products are also available at fixed prices in department stores. Bargains can be done at small shops or with street vendors. Popular items include silk and leather products, silverware, ceramics, and items carved out of softwood. Thailand’s jewelry is renowned for its

craftsmanship and relatively low prices. However, necessary precautions should be taken before buying jewelry:

- Disregard all strangers' offers of free assistance or services. Shopkeepers pay a 10-30 percent commission to people who bring them customers and the price will be increased accordingly.
- Compare and negotiate the price of jewelry at different shops before buying.
- Note that any claim made by a shopkeeper that purchases can be refunded at Thai embassies, consulates, or other government agencies abroad is false
- Make sure that all documents such as receipts, quality certificates, and credit card slips clearly indicate the name and address of the shop and the full purchase price.

Be aware that it is the general practice of jewelry shops in Thailand that all goods, once purchased, cannot be returned. However, if refund is offered, usually 25-30 percent of the purchase price will be deducted. Some reputable companies will take back jewelry for a full refund within 30 days after purchase.