



PHUKET

THAILAND

Phuket (pronounced pook-et) is situated off the west coast of Thailand in the Andaman Sea. It is Thailand's largest island, 30 miles (48 km) long and 12 miles (19 km) wide. It is believed to have been settled as early as the 1st century B.C. It was part of the original Thai states from early times and was known by various names, Cape Salang by the Malays as well as Tongka, Junk Ceylon and Sonsalam. Today it is referred to as "The Pearl of the Andaman Sea." Its magnificent white sand beaches, dramatic coves and bays, luxuriant rain forest, rice paddy fields, rubber and coconut plantations have made Phuket one of Southeast Asia's most fashionable beach resorts.

Phuket Island, with a population of approximately 320,000 inhabitants is also noted for its rich tin mines which account for nearly one third of the Thai tin production. The island is connected to the mainland of Phang Nga Province by 2 bridges (Thepkasatree Bridge and Sarasin Bridge). Phuket Town is located in the southeastern portion of the island and is the capital of the country's island province. It has good shopping, dependable communication facilities and some examples of Colonial and Indo-Portuguese mansions constructed by Chinese merchant barons. These barons made their fortunes in tin and rubber production after the 18th century when large numbers of Chinese came to live on the island.

Today, this city of 140,000 is also a major port and commercial center, exporting tin, charcoal, lumber and fish products.



HISTORY

Archaeologists believe that there has been continuous human occupation of Thailand for the last 20,000 years. In the 10th century A.D. the first recorded accounts show a migration of people to Thailand from southwest China. By 970 A.D. the two established Thai states unified to form the Kingdom of Ayuthaya. Their most powerful rivals were the Burmese who defeated the Ayuthaya Kingdom in 1569. The Burmese ruled for 15 years, only to be driven out in 1584.

In 1767, the Burmese returned and again occupied the Thai capital, ending Ayuthaya's rule. Within two years, the Burmese were expelled from Thailand and a new dynasty was founded by Chao Phraya Chakkri, known as Rama I. It was he who placed the capital at Krung Thep (Bangkok) in 1782. King Mongkut (Rama IV) ruled from 1851 to 1868 and began to modernize the country by introducing Western ideas. He is the King featured in the book and film, "The King and I." Rama IV was also the King who officially used the word "Siam" for the first time. The popular name then, and sometimes used today, was Muang Thai, meaning "Land of the Free." His son, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) implemented a policy of internal Western reform from 1886 to 1910 and in 1917 the Thai Kingdom joined the allies during World War I.

A coup d'etat in 1932 ended the absolute monarchy and a constitutional regime was established with the King's support. In 1939 the country was officially renamed Thailand. From 1932 until 1980 there was considerable political unrest with a series of governments, mostly military. However, since 1768 Thailand has remained independent. It has good relations with neighboring countries and is the only southeast Asia country never to have come under Western colonial rule.

Phuket Marine Biology Center and Aquarium is on the south coast and also acts as a foster home to sea turtles. The group has successfully raised and released over 50,000 turtles and endangered species.

Wat Phra Thong Temple, within the Thalang District and approximately 12 miles (20 km) from town, houses a famous half buried Buddha image. The temple also houses a Buddhist learning center for monks. In this same area you will find the Khao Phra Taew National Park with an unspoiled jungle, displays on rainforest ecology, a small waterfall and some wildlife exhibits.

Khao Rang (Phuket Hill) is located northwest of town. The elevation of this hill permits a view of both Phuket Town and the islands interior.

Ao Phang Nga is located over 59 miles (95 km) from Phuket and is quite scenic. Limestone cliffs, rock formations and islands that rise out of the sea are some of the highlights of this area. It is from here that you can reach "James Bond Island" and the site where "The Man with the Golden Gun" was filmed.

SHORE EXCURSIONS

To make the most of your visit to Phuket and surrounding areas, we suggest you take one of the organized Shore Excursions. For further information consult your Shore Excursion brochure or contact the Shore Excursion desk. When going ashore, be advised to take only necessary items and secure any valuables onboard.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Bargaining: Prices tend to be fixed in department stores, but smaller shops will negotiate. Bargaining, brought to Thailand many years ago by Arab and Indian traders, is essential in dealing in Bazaars and with street vendors.

Tipping: Tipping is not a normal practice within Thailand, but has become standard in up-market hotels and restaurants. If no service charge is included, 10% would be acceptable.

Dress Code: The Thai people are very aware of neatness and style. Within Phuket, T-Shirts, shorts, jeans and casual clothes will get you through most any occasion. Wear slip-on shoes to temples and ensure that socks do not have holes. Men should keep their shirts on at all times, except at the beach. Topless sun bathing and "thong" swimsuits are frowned upon, but nonetheless many visitors do it anyway.

Avoiding Offence: Pointing the soles of the feet at a person or touching his head is considered rude in all Thailand. Never mutilate or step on a currency note as it contains a portrait of the revered King.

LOCAL CUISINE AND DRINK SPECIALITIES

Thai food is heavily influenced by the Chinese with elements from the Portuguese, Dutch and French. It is a blend of five distinct tastes: sweet, sour, salty, bitter and hot. Generally spicy, various dishes are in abundance as Thai's love to eat. The national dish is Khao Phat - fried rice and egg, cucumber and chillies. A good introduction to Thai food is Tum Yum Goong - a soup with prawns, chillies and lemon grass, or Tum Yum Gai - with chicken substituted for the prawns. Dishes such as Phat Thai Kai - fried noodles, peanuts, beansprouts, eggs, chillies and chicken, are popular. As for desserts, they tend to be very sweet and/or sticky. Mango with sticky (glutinous) rice blended with coconut milk is a favorite. The fruits of Mangosteen, Pomelos, Jackfruit, Rambutan and Durian are the best in the world.

Fresh fruit blends help to ease the heat of both the food and climate. Mekong Whiskey is about half the strength of scotch and quite popular, while Singha Beer is the best known local brew. Bottled water is recommended.

SHOPPING FACILITIES

The main shopping areas are found along Phang Nga Road, Rasda Road and the Time Square Complex near the Metropole Hotel in Phuket Town. Shopping can also be found in Patong Beach along Thaviwong Road, Soi Bangla and Rat U Thit Road. The specialties of the area include bronzeware, paintings, gold jewelry (22-24 kt), carved wood, laquerware, Thai silk, pearls, gems and Thai celadon (ceramics). Some tourist oriented stores and street merchants may accept U.S. Dollars. Most stores accept major credit cards.

LOCAL CURRENCY

The unit of currency in Thailand is called the Baht (THB), pronounced "bot." There are 100 Stang to the Baht. Notes are available in the following denominations: 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 and 1,000.

