

Section 8

Tourism in Thailand

Section profile

This section deals with Thailand's tourist industry as a whole, providing essential information on the state of the industry, its direction and plans, as well as providing invaluable hints and tips for visitors. Further information can be obtained from the Tourism Authority of Thailand. A complete listing of all TAT offices appears at the end of the section.

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8.1 Introduction to Thailand 2000 and beyond

Since the launch of the highly-successful *Visit Thailand Year* in 1987, the Kingdom has steadily entrenched itself as a premier destination on the world tourist map.

Successive promotions have enhanced the image of the country as a destination with a wide variety of attractions and a unique exotic charm.

Like its predecessor more than a decade ago, the most recent promotion, *Amazing Thailand*, which ran its course at the end of the century, served to sustain the industry during the hard economic times which began with the financial crisis of mid-1997. Of all of the countries in the region, Thailand managed to record respectable growth, although for obvious reasons, not as high as had been predicted because of the regional spread of the economic crisis.

Thailand will see in the new millennium with a new focus: *Thailand 2000: Enchantment for the next 100 years*. A sub theme will be *Treasures for the Pleasure of the World*, with a target of 8.8 million visitors in 2000. The promotion will also embrace the *Way of Genuine Thai*, with particular emphasis on culture, lifestyle and hospitality.

In order to meet its targets, Thailand acknowledges that it cannot simply rely on its tried and tested destinations and travel products. In order to compete, it accepts it will have to constantly upgrade and improve, and tackle persistent problems, such as site degradation and over-pricing.

To this end, talks are well advanced on the establishment of a full tourist Ministry and a National Tourist Board. Proponents say the TAT, which falls as a division under the Prime Minister's Office, presently lacks sufficient clout to effectively oversee the country's biggest foreign exchange earner.

Under the plan, the TAT would become a state enterprise under the new Ministry, which would act as both a tourism manager and a regulator.

Whatever the outcome, however, it is clear that the country is committed to developing the industry in a sustainable manner to cope with the challenges and demands of the new century.

8.1.1 Revenue

In 1998, the country earned 242,177 million baht in tourism receipts, up 9.70 percent over the 220,754 million baht of the previous year. This constituted 35.60 percent of Thailand's services receipts and 8.46 percent of total exports of goods and services. The average expenditure per person per day was 3,712.93 baht. However, in the first six months of 1999, average tourist spending dropped by four percent to 3,650 baht per day, and as a result total growth in spending in the first half of 1999 has been six percent, to 129.4 million baht.

Figure 8.1: Tourist arrivals to Thailand

Year	Number of tourist arrivals	% change	Average length of stay	Tourism receipts (million baht)
1997	7,221,345	+0.41	8.33 days	220,754
1998	7,764,930	+7.53	8.44 days	242,177
1999 (Jan-Aug)	5,621,718	+11.47	8.45 days	129.4

Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand

8.1.2 Arrivals

The World Tourism Organisation predicts Thailand has the potential to attract 32 million visitors by 2020.

For the immediate future, however, the country has set itself an ambitious target of 8.8 million arrivals in 2000. To date, despite the regional economic crisis, the figure looks achievable.

The industry recorded an 11.1 percent year-on-year growth in arrivals for the first half of 1999, totalling 4,172,891 people. In 1998, the number of arrivals was 7,764,930, which was a 7.53 increase over the 7,221,345 1997 figure.

Average length of stay in 1998 rose to 8.40 days, up slightly from 8.33 the previous year.

Arrivals by nationality

There were 4,282,589 tourists from East Asia, a slight decline by 1.18 percent, while 2,108,909 tourists came from Europe – a strong increase of 21.51 percent. The Americas produced a sharp increase of 17.91 percent, at 538,293. Arrivals from Oceania, at 343,938, represented a 22.36 percent increase over 1997. The arrival figures from South Asia, the Middle East and Africa were 265,054, 148,597 and 77,550 with a growth of 9.30, 29.76 and 35.55 percent respectively.

Tourist profile

In 1998, the proportion of male to female visitors remained stable, while there was a sharp growth of 11.33 percent in the number of independent arrivals, while group packages increased only 2.33 percent. This was mainly due to the decline in the number of visitors from the major markets in East Asia, such as Malaysia, South Korea and Indonesia.

Unlike 1997, there was a high growth in the number of first visit tourists, rising 9.09 percent. They were mostly from Europe, the Americas and Oceania.

The average age of tourist arrivals slightly increased from 1997's 39.20 years to 39.29 years. The largest proportion of visitors, about 22 percent of total arrivals, were professionals, generating an increase of nearly 24 percent over the previous year.

Figure 8.2: Tourist arrivals by category

Category	% of total 1998
First visit	48.80
Group	40.17
Male	61.16
Age	25-34 yrs 27.33%; 35-44 yrs– 23.92%
Purpose of visit	Holiday – 88%; Business – 9.09%

Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand

8.1.3 New initiatives

In addition to promoting its core attractions, such as the proven beach destinations of Phuket, Koh Samui and the northern city of Chiang Mai, and Thai culture and food, Thailand will focus on opening new destinations and extending the visitors' length of stay.

Secondary sites spotlighted are the beach sites of Trang, Krabi, Chumphon and Trat. The Northeast (Isan), which has fallen below expectations, will also receive special attention.

This will be addressed by an Isan sales manual designed for travel agents in which tourism products focusing on the links to Mekong countries will be emphasised.

Similarly, health, health foods, herbal medicines, meditation, and spa and massage services will be highlighted. A health manual has been specially prepared for travel agents: *Blue Horizon, Green Heartland*.

Other areas of focus include adventure travel, which ties in with the broad theme of developing eco-tourism and enhancing environmental awareness.

Niche markets have been identified to fill in some of the gaps in the low season. months of May to October – Japan, the United States and eastern Europe.

In Japan, authorities will be looking at senior citizens, students and youth travellers, farmers on agricultural exchange programmes, and health-conscious visitors. Tourists from special interest groups tend to stay longer, and Japanese senior citizens will be allowed to obtain visas for up to one year. The main focus will be Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Fukuoka and cold areas such as Soppero.

In the United States, a niche market is Vietnam War veterans who spent time in Thailand during the conflict in the 1970s.

The region identified as having the most growth potential is Eastern Europe, Russia and the former Soviet Bloc countries.

8.2 Planning your trip

Thailand has a population of more than 60 million people with an area of 514,400 square kilometres – approximately the size of France or the states of California and New York combined. It can be categorised into five main regions, each of which has its own charm and attractions and which in their diversity allow a visitor to experience a range of “holidays within a holiday”.

The North

This region consists of 17 provinces with an approximate area of 170,000 square kilometres bordering Laos and Myanmar. The Golden Triangle, where the three countries meet on the Mekong River, is renowned not only for its geographical uniqueness, but also as a region of opium growing. The region is rugged, with steep mountain ranges and tropical forests. Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai are the two largest cities, while Mae Hong Son, although small, is one of the most attractive towns in the Kingdom as it sits in a crook of a sweeping, misty valley. Trekking, rafting, elephant riding and visits to some of the many hill tribe villages are key attractions.

The Northeast (Isan)

The Northeast of Thailand is commonly referred to as Isan, which denotes prosperity and vastness. On the latter count the appellation is accurate, as the region covers 170,000 square kilometres, on the former not so – Isan is the poorest region in the country.

Isan borders Laos and Cambodia to the east. The principal cities are Nakhon Ratchasima (Khorat), Ubon Ratchathani and Udon Thani. The region is dry and generally flat (the area was the scene of some of the worst deforestation in the country before logging was officially banned in the late 1980s). What the region lacks in wealth and geography, though, is amply compensated for by a rich cultural heritage dating back to Khmer times.

Its people, too, have a justifiable reputation for friendliness, while their food is as hot as it gets.

Border towns such as Nong Khai and Mukdaham serve as good springboards for Laos and Cambodia across the Mekong River.

The Central Region

The plains of the Central Region, which embrace 22 provinces, provide the country's most fertile land in rice farms and fruit orchids. The region also abounds in tourist attractions, (apart from Bangkok) notably, the ancient capital of Ayutthaya, and the infamous Bridge over the River Kwai at Katchanaburi.

The East

Thailand's eastern sea coast is generally known for the resort of Pattaya. However it extends well beyond this international playground to Chantaburi and Trad, and the country's third largest, at least developed island, Koh Chang. Waterfalls, mountains, beaches and islands abound. Ten kilometres before Pattaya is Bang Saen, a popular beach with Thais, and an excellent opportunity to experience the country as the local people do.

The South

Southern Thailand consists of 14 provinces stretching down the Thai peninsular, with the Gulf on Thailand to the east, and the Andaman Sea (Indian Ocean) to the west. To the south is Malaysia.

The region is inextricably linked to its beaches, with the islands of Phuket and Koh Samui the most famous on the tourist map. There are countless other lush tropical islands, however, for more adventurous travellers, not to mention less visited towns such as Chumphon and Songkhla. With the opening of direct air links between Bangkok and Krabi, this exotic destination is likely to experience increased visits.

Bangkok, The City of Angels

Bangkok is the usual gateway for travellers. In addition to its own attractions, specifically the Grand Palace and the Temple of Dawn, one can use the capital as a base for trips to out-of-town sites, such as Ayutthaya and Kanchanaburi.

Bangkok is a sprawling city of more than 10 million people. Even though the nation and its capital are large, one will not have any problem getting around. Transport across town or across the country is both convenient and inexpensive.

In Bangkok, air-conditioned taxis with metres are plentiful. An alternative type of taxi is the "samlor" or "tuk tuk", a three-wheeled vehicle. They are noisy and open to traffic fumes, but popular with visitors who find them exotic. The fare must be negotiated in advance.

River taxis ply the Chao Phraya. Some are cross-river ferries and others serve the many piers on both banks as far as the northern suburb of Nonthaburi.

Bangkok's public bus service covers every area of the city. There are both air-conditioned (blue) and non-air conditioned (red and cream) buses. Although they are crowded during rush hours, they are cheap. Maps of bus routes are available at tourist outlets.

Thai Airways, Bangkok Airways and Angel Air connect Bangkok with most major provincial cities and towns. On main routes, such as to Chiang Mai and Phuket, there are several flights daily.

Travel by train is also convenient and inexpensive to the North, South, and Northeast. Air-

conditioned sleepers are ideal for long journeys. Tickets must be booked at the main railway station, Hualamphong, which has recently undergone a face lift, making it considerably more user-friendly.

The most comprehensive transportation network is the government-operated long-distance bus service. There is scarcely a town that is not served either on a direct Bangkok route or a feeder service from a provincial centre.

There are many car hire firms in Thailand, including international companies such as Hertz and Avis. The road system is good, although the driving at times leaves something to be desired.

8.3 Do's and don'ts

Perhaps one of the most pleasing feelings for a visitor to Thailand is to be genuinely complimented for one's appalling mangling of the tonal Thai language.

Thais are known for their tolerance and hospitality, and it gives them pleasure that as a foreigner, you have at least made an attempt to try their language. Basic common sense, good manners and respect of things different will help the average tourist negotiate what potentially can be a minefield of cultural difficulties.

The Monarchy

Thais revere the Royal Family, and visitors should be careful to show respect to His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, and their family. December 5 1999 will be a special day in the country as His Majesty celebrates his Sixth Cycle (72nd) birthday. In cinemas, a portrait of the King is shown during the playing of the national anthem, and patrons are required to stand up. Similarly, the national anthem is played at 8am and 6pm every day in many public places. It is customary to stand still when this happens. If in doubt, follow what other Thais do. Thailand has strict *les majeste* laws, and enforces them rigidly.

Religion

Thai law has special sections on religious offences, covering not only Buddhism, which is the faith of the majority of the country, but also other religions. It is unlawful to commit any act to an object or a place of worship in a manner to insult the religion. It is also unlawful to cause any disturbance at an assembly engaged in religious worship or ceremonies or to dress up or use the symbols of a priest or novice, holy man or clergy.

Advice for visiting a religious place:

- All Buddha images, large or small, ruined or not, are regarded as sacred. Don't climb up on one to take a photograph, or do anything that might show disrespect.
- Dress neatly. Do not go to a temple shirtless, or in shorts, or with sandals. Pants are considered unsuitable attire for women visiting a temple. Officials at the Grand Palace in Bangkok are particularly strict and will refuse entry to anyone thought to be unsuitably dressed.
- It is acceptable to wear shoes while walking around the compound of a temple, but not inside the chapel.
- In a Muslim mosque, men should wear hats and women should be well covered with slacks or a long skirt, a long sleeved blouse buttoned to the neck and a scarf over the head. All should remove their shoes before entering the mosque and should not be present during a religious gathering.
- Buddhist priests are forbidden to touch or be touched by a woman or to accept anything from the hand of one. If a woman has to give anything to a monk or novice, she first hands it to a man who then presents it. In a case where the woman wants to present

something herself, the monk or novice will spread out a piece of saffron robe or handkerchief, and the woman should place the object on the robe.

Social norms

The customs of everyday social behaviour are less clearly defined than those concerning the monarchy or religion, especially in Bangkok where Western customs are widely accepted. Keep in mind:

- Thais don't normally shake hands when they greet one another, rather they press the palms of their hands together in a prayer-like *wai*. Generally a younger person *wais* an older one, who then returns it. As a foreigner, it is advisable to always *wai* first, with the hands held high. Note that a monk does not return a *wai*. It is certainly not disrespectful, simply the custom.
- It is considered rude to use your foot for pointing, especially at a person. In this regard, the head is regarded as the highest part of the body, both literally and figuratively. Thus Thais don't touch each other on the head. Don't sit with your feet raised on a table, it is extremely discourteous.
- Public displays of affection in public are looked down upon. You may see some Westernised young Thai couples holding hands, but that is the extent of the displaying of affection in this polite society.
- Losing your temper, especially in public, will likely get you nowhere. The Thais see such displays as poor manners. You are more apt to get what you want by keeping a cool head and concealing your emotions. The louder you become, the quieter a Thai will go, and most likely smile. It is not a smile of happiness, though, rather one of embarrassment and annoyance.
- Do not be surprised if you are addressed by your first name; for instance, as Mr. Bob or Miss Mary, instead of by your surname. This is because Thais refer to one another in this manner, usually with the title *khun* (Mr., Mrs., or Miss) in front. In areas outside of Bangkok, you will often be greeted with a loud call of *farang*. It is not derogatory, simply an expression that you are not Thai. Many white varieties of white fruit and vegetables have *farang* in the name, such as guava and potato.

Advice to visitors

Visitors arriving at Bangkok's international airport should to use only the authorised transportation services from the airport to the city and other areas. Beware of touts or people claiming to be guides. Transport available includes a limousine service, metered taxis, and airport buses. All are clearly marked. For taxis, expressway tolls are extra, and there is a 50 baht surcharge.

Those who need help with accommodation should consult the Thai Hotel Association counter in the passengers greeting area.

Observe all normal precautions on personal safety and the safety of your belongings. Walking alone on quiet streets or deserted areas is not recommended. Be sure that all your valuables—money, jewellery, airline tickets, etc. are protected.

Visitors needing assistance relating to safety, security, unethical practices or other matters should call the Tourist Assistance Centre at: 281-5051 or 282-8129 or the Tourist Police at 255-2964-8 or 255-1699.

Penalties for drugs offences are very severe in Thailand. Don't get involved with drugs.

Shopping advice

A wide variety of souvenirs made locally are available at fair prices in Thailand. For those who do not have much time and don't want to bother bargaining, they are available at fixed

prices in department stores. Bargains can be found at small shops or with street vendors. Popular items include silk products, leather products, silverware, ceramics, and products carved out of soft wood. Thailand's jewellery is renowned for its craftsmanship and relatively low prices. Especially when purchasing jewellery, tourists should:

At **ALL** costs, disregard all strangers' offers of free assistance or services, no matter how convincing their story might be. Be aware that shop owners pay a 10-30 percent commission to people who bring customers to their shops, so they increase their jewellery prices accordingly. Compare and negotiate the price of jewellery in several different shops before deciding to buy.

Please be informed that any claim made by the shopowner that purchases can be refunded at Thai embassies, consulates, or other government agencies abroad is not true. 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.

It is the general practice of jewellery shops in Thailand that all goods, once purchased, cannot be returned. However, in the case of a possible refund, 25-30 percent the price paid is deducted as a cost of damage. Some reputable companies will take back jewellery for a full refund, although usually some time limit, such as 30 days, is imposed.

Value Added Tax (VAT) refunds

Foreign tourists are allowed to claim back the seven percent VAT charged in Thailand. The goods must be purchased from stores displaying the VAT Refund for Tourists sign. On any day, goods purchased at participating stores must not be less than 2,000 baht and the total amount of goods purchased, including VAT, must not be less than 5,000 baht. At each store, ask the sales assistant to complete two VAT refund forms and attach them to the original receipt. Claims can be made in the departure lounges of international airports after check-in and passport control.

8.4: Immigration and other information

8.4.1 Visas needed to enter Thailand

There are eight categories of entry visas available to visitors to Thailand.

1. Transit Visa (TS) for those who are in transit. This visa allows for a stay of 30 days.
2. Tourist Visa (TR) is for visitors who visit the country for tourist purposes. They can stay for 60 days.
3. Non-Immigrant Visa (Non-Immigrant) is for foreigners who wish to work either for official business or private business, study, undertake research, or stay with a family. This visa lasts for 90 days.
4. Official Visas are issued to foreigners who are assigned to perform their official duties in the Kingdom and for holders of Official Passports of other countries or a United Nations Passport or its equivalent. These visas are valid for 90 days.
5. Diplomatic Visas are issued to foreigners who perform their duties as foreign diplomatic officials or who carry out official business by holding a Diplomatic Passport. Foreigners who enter the Kingdom with this category of visa will be permitted to stay for 90 days.
6. Immigrant Visas are for those who wish to take up permanent residence in Thailand.

7. Non-Quota Immigrant Visas are issued to foreigners who have applied for a residence permit under a special case quota or under Non-Quota Immigrant status.

8. Courtesy Visas

Normally, visitors must be in possession of a valid passport and visa before arriving in Thailand. These can be obtained from Royal Thai Embassies or Consulates abroad. However, some countries are exempt from this requirement.

The following 97 nationalities are permitted to obtain an entry visa on arrival at one of the international airports in Thailand – Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket and Had Yai. They are valid for 15 days.

African Republic, Albania, Amtogia and Barbida, Andorra, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Chile, Columbia, Comoros, Costa Rica, Cote d' Ivoire, Cyprus, Chech Republic, Comonica, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Ecuador, Gabon, Ethiopia, Grenada, Gambia, Guinea, Guatemala, Haiti, Grunea Bissau, India, Honduras, Kiribati, Jamaica, Lesotho, Kyrgyz Republic, Liechtenstein, Liberia, Maldives, Malawi, Malta, Mali, Mauritius, Monaco, Niger, Nauru, Paraguay, Panama, Republic of Armenia, Peru, Republic of Belarus, Republic of Anzerbaijan, Republic of Estonia, Republic of Croatia, Republic of Hungary, Republic of Georgia, Republic of Latvia, Republic of Kazakhstan, Republic of Poland, Republic of Lithuania, Republic of Uzbekistan, Republic Tajikiatan, Russian Federation, Romania, St. Christopher and Nevis, Rwanda, San Marino, St. Lucia, Seychelles, Sao Tome and Principe, Slovak Republic, Sierra Leone, Somali, Solomon Islands, Suriname, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Tanzania, Swaziland, Tonga, Togo, Turkmenistan, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, Tuvalu, Uruguay, Ukraine, Venezuela, Vatican City State, Zambia, Zaire, Republic of Moldavia, Zimbabwe.

Nationalities of 56 countries benefit from the visa exemption regulation which permits them to enter and stay in Kingdom for 30 days without an entry visa. This exemption is for holders of ordinary passports only.

Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bahrain, Brunei, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Ireland, Japan, Norway, Israel, Djibouti, Kenya, Western Samoa, Kuwait, Italy, Malaysia, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, Netherlands, Oman, Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Senegal, South Korean, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, South Africa, Turkey, Vanuatu, Yemen, United States of America, United Arab Emirates, Papua New Guinea, Switzerland, United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, New Zealand.

Three countries have bilateral agreements with Thailand to permit their nationals who hold ordinary passports to enter and stay in the Kingdom for 90 days without an entry visa – Brazil, New Zealand and South Korea.

Other

The Immigration Bureau must be informed when a foreigner resides with or rents the property of a Thai Citizen. For provincial areas, the owner of the house must inform the Immigration Office, or if not available, the local police station.

Visa extensions, usually of two weeks for tourists, can be obtained at the immigration Office off Sathon Tai Road, see address below. No exit visas are required. If a visitor overstays his visit, he or she will be charged 100 baht per day. This penalty can be paid on departure.

No inoculations or vaccinations are required unless one is coming from or has passed through contaminated areas. Yellow fever certificates are required for those who are coming from endemic or infected areas.

Procedures for lost passport

A foreigner whose passport was either lost or stolen after entering the Kingdom must do the following:

- File a report at the police station in the area where the passport was lost or stolen.
- Take the police report to your embassy or consulate and apply for a new one or substitute
- Take the new passport or substitute document to the Immigration Bureau to the visa re-stamped at:

Section 4 (Records, Stamps; Statistics), Sub-division 4, Immigration Bureau, Room 311, 3rd Floor, Old Building, Soi Suan Plu, South Sathorn Road, Sathorn District, Bangkok 10120.

Tel: (662) 287-3101-10 Ext. 2244.

The following documents must be shown:

- Passport or substitute document
- The report from a police station
- A document from the embassy or consulate certifying the new passport.

8.4.2 Customs regulations

Prohibited items: All kinds of narcotics (hemp, opium, cocaine, morphine, heroin), obscene literature, pictures or articles.

Firearms: Firearms and ammunition may not be imported unless a permit has been obtained from the Police Department or local Registration Office.

Personal effects: A reasonable amount of clothing for personal use, toilet articles, and professional instruments may be brought in free of duty.

Cameras: One still-camera or one movie camera can be brought in without duty. Five rolls of still-camera film or three rolls of eight or 16 mm movie-camera film may be brought in free of duty.

Tobacco, alcoholic beverages: Cigarettes, cigars or smoking tobacco each or in total must not exceed 250 grams in weight, excepting cigarettes which may not exceed 200 in quantity. One litre each of wine or spirits may be brought in free of duty.

Household effects: A reasonable amount of used household effects, accompanied by the owner are also free of duty.

Plants and animals: Certain species of fruit, vegetables, and plants are prohibited. Please contact the Agricultural Regulatory Division, Bangkok, Bangkok Tel: 5791-581, 579-3576. Authorisation to import animals arriving by air can be obtained at the airport. If by sea, application must be made at the Department of Livestock Development, Bangkok Tel: 251-5136-8. Vaccination certificates are required.

Export of antiques and art objects

Export of Buddha images, Bodhisattva images or fragments thereof from Thailand is prohibited. Exceptions are made only for worship by Buddhists' or cultural exchanges, or for study purposes. A licence must be obtained from the Department of Fine Arts of antiquity or objects of art, whether originals or reproductions, may be taken out of the country.

Procedure for licence application:

- Photograph the front view of objects and make two postcard-sized prints (not more than five pieces in one photograph)
- Photocopy of the applicant's passport.

Present the objects, together with the photographs and the applicant's passport with photocopy at the National Museum Division, Bangkok or the national museums in Chiang Mai, Songkhla, Phuket, Ubon Ratchathani, Udon Thani (Ban Chiang) at least seven-10 days

before the date of shipment or departure of the applicant. For further information, contact the Bangkok National Museum, Tel. 226-1661, 224-1370.

Export of wild animal products

Any wild animal product to be taken out of Thailand must be licensed or certified by the Royal Forestry Department. Such products include those made from the skins of reptiles such as crocodiles, snakes, monitor lizards, and long tailed monitors. For further information, please call the Wildlife Conservation Division, Tel. And fax 561-4838, 561-4292 ext. 709. Note in some countries the import of unlicensed wild products or illegal and the importer be fined or imprisoned.

Temporary import of a vehicle for tourism

Required are:

- A valid International Driving License and passport or equivalent documents
- Vehicle registration or, in the case of a borrowed vehicle, authorisation documents from the owner
- A cash guarantee. If a vehicle is brought in through Bangkok airport or Khlong Toei Port, a cash guarantee or bank guarantee is essential. If entry is via the southern border, it is acceptable to guarantee oneself by completing the customs form, giving necessary details to the customs officer and signing the record. Permission is granted for a six- month period from the date of entry. If you requested to bring the vehicle in for just five to 10 days and then wish to extend, a renewal can be granted free of charge by the Customs Department.

Procedure:

- Contact the customs office at the relevant border.
- The customs officer will complete an additional incoming form and check the documents and fix the self-guarantee.
- In the case of cash or bank guarantee, the customs officer will evaluate the price of the vehicle according to its conditions plus 20 percent. For further information, please contact the Customs Department, Tel. 249-4297, 249-0431 ext. 1170.

Currency

The currency is the baht which consists of 100 satang. Copper coins are valued 25 and 50 satang. Silver coins are in denominations of 1, 5 and 10 baht. Bank notes are valued at 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 and 1,000 baht.

The exchange rate of foreign currencies against the Thai baht may change daily as the baht floats freely on international money markets. It is advisable to exchange foreign currencies only at commercial banks, currency exchange services or authorised money changers. Their business hours are generally as follows:

- Banks: 9.30 am – 3.30 pm every day except Saturday, Sunday and bank holidays. Some banks have recently received permission to open at weekends – their branches can usually be found at major department stores.
- Authorised money changers: 24-hour service in hotels, 9.00 am – 9:00 pm at most other locations.

Exchange control

Foreign tourists may freely bring in foreign bank notes or other types of foreign exchange. Upon leaving Thailand, a foreign tourist may freely take out foreign means of payment in any amount.

The maximum amount of the local currency which may be taken out of the country without authorisation is 50,000 baht per person, unless the person is visiting neighbouring countries

Malaysia, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, in which case the maximum is 500,000 baht. There is no restriction on the amount of Thai currency that can be brought into Thailand. Foreign visitors are also allowed to take out merchandise bought from duty free shops, including precious stones, gold and platinum ornaments.

Foreign visitors are welcome to open foreign currency accounts with authorised banks in Thailand. No restrictions are imposed on the maintenance of and withdrawal from the account as long as the funds originate from abroad. Non-residents can also open baht accounts at local banks.

General information

Work

It is illegal to work in Thailand without a valid work permit. Offenders face a stiff fine and expulsion, their employers an even stiffer fine.

Tax clearance: All visitors who have derived income while staying in Thailand are required to pay income tax.

Credit cards: All major credit cards are accepted in leading hotels, restaurants, department stores and several large stores.

Climate: Tropical with a high humidity. Average temperature is 82 F, or 27 C. Thailand has three seasons: hot (March to May), rainy (June to October) and cool (November to February).

Clothing: Normally the tropical climate calls for washable cotton, light and loose dresses with comfortable shoes or sandals. During the cool season, visitors should bring a sweater or a jacket. Umbrellas are necessary during the rainy season.

Time: GMT plus seven hours.

Business hours:

Government offices: 08.30-12.00, 13.00-16.30 hours

Banks: 09.30-15.30

Department Stores: 10.00-21.00

Private offices: 08.00-17.00

Shops: 08.00-20.00

Note: Saturdays and Sundays are bank and government holidays. However most tourist shops are open.

Communications: Most major hotels offer long-distance calls, fax, postal, and other communications services. The General Post Office on New Road, Bangrak offers 24-hours comprehensive service, including fax, telex, cable and long-distance calls. Numerous Internet cafes across the city offer access to the World Wide Web.

Tipping: It is not necessary to tip taxi drivers. It is customary to tip hotel personnel who have given good personal service. A 10 percent service charge is added to most hotels and restaurant bills, so tipping is not required but is always appreciated.

Water: It is advisable to drink only bottled or boiled water.

Driving licence: An international driving licence is required.

Language: English is widely understood in hotels, gift shops and restaurants in Bangkok and other major tourist areas.

8.5 Activities and attractions for children

Siam Water Park

Siam Water Park is a 30-minute drive from Bangkok, in a suburb of Minburi. It features an extensive man-made sea with artificial surf, whirlpools, fountains and waterfalls, and towering water slides amid landscaped gardens. Other attractions include children's playgrounds, aviaries, an open zoo, and botanical gardens. The park is open from 10:00am to 6:00 pm on weekdays and 9:00am to 7:00 pm on weekends. Admission fee.

Dusit Zoo

Located near Vimanmek Palace in Central Bangkok, the zoo is open to the public every day from 5:00 am to 6:00 pm. Tropical animals here include great grey kangaroos, Sumatra rhinoceros, Siamese crocodiles, guars and lesser mouse deer. A central pond features pedal boats. Admission fee.

Safari World

This is located at Km 9, Ram Indra Road, Minburi, and covers an area of some 170 acres. It is divided into two parts. Safari Park houses a large variety of animals like zebras, deer, giraffes, birds, tigers, lions and bears in a natural habitat. Visitors can drive through in their own cars, or ride in the Safari World's air-conditioned coaches. The Marine Park exhibits marine and rare animals. Visitors can enjoy performances by trained animals like dolphins, birds, seals, and monkeys. Restaurants and game shops are also available and a tram service is provided for touring to the park. Admission fee.

Magicland

This amusement park is located on Phahonyothin Road on the way to Don Muang Airport. Within its beautifully decorated area there are linked paths, pools, castles and more than 30 fun rides. It is open from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm on weekdays and 10:00 am to 7:00 pm on weekends. Admission fee.

Dream World

This large amusement park is a 10-minute drive from Don Muang Airport. It is beautifully landscaped and has a variety of fun rides and games for the whole family. It is open from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm on weekdays and from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm on weekends. Admission fee.

Shopping malls

Several of the larger department stores, such as the Mall, have water parks on their roofs. They feature giant slides and pools. Highly recommended as oasis in the heart of the city. The majority of department stores also have activity areas for children, as do some of the fast food shops, such as KFC and McDonalds.

Khoo Khieo Open Zoo

The Zoo is 11 kilometres from Bangkokpra market, between Chonburi and Pattaya. Operated by the Zoo Organisation, it covers an area of 2,000 acres. More than 100 species of wildlife roam freely in its compound. Tourists can walk and have a close look at monkeys, gibbons, elephants, deer, and birds. The zoo is open every day from 8.00-18.00hrs.

Crocodile Farm

The farm is in Samut Prakan on the eastern outskirts of Bangkok. The many shows a day are a must for kids (and adults too) with experienced handlers putting the crocodiles through their paces. There are also elephant shows, and a zoo, with restaurants and curio shops. Open daily. Admission fee.

Lumpini Park

One of the most underrated spots in the centre of the city. While it does not have specific attractions for children, other than pedal boats on the central lake, it is an invaluable green lung in the heart of the city. Children and adults alike can stretch their legs, feed the ducks and birds, or simply unwind at the friendly restaurant in the north-west corner.

8.6: Special interest activities

8.6.1 Golf

Golfing is one of the true delights in Thailand. The country has more than 200 excellent courses, most available for as little as US\$15-US\$20 for an 18-hole round. The exotic tropical scenery is enhanced by frequent drink stops (essential in the heat), and the charming caddies, who are an integral part of a round. Many people hire as many as three caddies – one for the bag, one for the umbrella, and one for a folding chair.

Playing golf in Thailand differs a little from other countries. Generally, courses do not limit the number of players per group. The result is that there can be as many as 20 people in a group, including caddies. This phenomenon has given rise to the “Thai crocodile” a long group of people winding its way around the course.

Almost all clubs have pro-shops and golf sets for hire. Used balls in good condition are also generally available.

Among Thailand’s best golf courses are:

Navathanee Golf Course

Created especially for the 1975 World Cup and designed by Robert Trent Jones, Navathanee has long been recognised as one of the country’s premier courses. The course is well over 6,200 yards, with an abundance of water hazards and challenging greens. Its high greens fees are more than justified in its superbly maintained facilities and clubhouse.

Tel: (02) 374-6127, 374-7077

Ekachai Golf Club

Opened in 1984, Ekachai is one of the country’s most testing courses. Water hazards feature on virtually every hole and the course is over 6,000 metres with mature trees and lush fairways. Ekachai is 20 kilometres west of Bangkok. It also has lights for night play.

Tel: (02) 416-5557-9

The Royal Golf and Country Club

A fine golf course southeast of Bangkok, the Club features a luxurious clubhouse and immaculately maintained greens, plus a host of challenging fairways.

Tel: (02) 661-8570-3

The Rose Garden

This beautiful course, 40 kilometres from Bangkok near the town of Nakhon Pathom, is certainly amongst the country’s finest golfing centres. The Rose Garden also offers first-class hotel accommodation in a natural setting.

Tel: (034) 322-771

Royal Hua Hin Golf Course

Opened in 1922, it is the oldest championship course in Thailand. It is also one of the most scenic, with sweepings views of the Gulf of Thailand and nearby temples and the coastal beach resort of Hua Hin. The course is located 200 kilometres southwest of Bangkok.

Tel: (032) 512-475

Siam Country Club

The best known and most popular of all the courses located in the Pattaya area, Siam Country Club is also one of the most challenging. Its undulating fairways are made even more difficult by numerous water hazards and other obstacles. Pattaya is 140 kilometres south of Bangkok.

Tel: (038) 249-381

Laem Chabang Golf Course

Set among the hills behind the resort of Pattaya, this relative newcomer to Thailand's golf scene is a long and thoroughly testing course. Electric golf carts are recommended, given the distance between holes, even for keep-fit fanatics. Laem Chabang is beautifully maintained and deserves its ranking amongst the country's best courses.

Tel: (038) 372-273

Blue Canyon Golf Course

Built on the site of a former tin mine on the island of Phuket, Blue Canyon makes clever use of gorges, lakes and hills to give players some extremely interesting tee shots. Because of its popularity, Blue Canyon is not usually accessible to non-members.

Phuket Golf and Country Club

Another Phuket course fashioned from a former tin mine, this club covers more than 400 acres and boasts some of the finest landscaped scenery on the island. Despite its relatively straightforward layout, the Club should not be underestimated. Several of its holes are far more difficult than one may think and its greens are almost always well bunkered. Its clubhouse is magnificent.

Lanna Golf Club

The best known of Chiang Mai's golf courses, the Lanna Club lies in the shadow of the city's surrounding mountains, and because of its northern location – Chiang Mai is 700 kilometres from Bangkok – the course experiences genuine seasonal changes, including refreshingly chilly mornings in the cool season.

Tel: (66-053) 211-911

Krungthep Kreta

The Club is the closest to Bangkok's city centre. Although it is essentially flat, the fairways are lined with trees that hide numerous water hazards.

Tel: (662) 379-3732

8.6.2 Shopping

Thailand presents shoppers with unparalleled opportunities. Since the flotation of the baht in mid-1997, goods are now truly competitive compared to prices in Hong Kong and Singapore. Thailand's handicrafts are products of time-honoured cottage industries and are distinguished by superb craftsmanship. Apart from a wide selection of unique locally-made goods, there are quality imported products from around the world.

Shopping in Thailand is an adventure in itself. From modern department stores and shopping plazas to flea markets and road-side stalls where bargaining is obligatory, even visitors with the greatest will power will no doubt find something to their liking.

Fixed prices are the norm in department stores, but at most other places bargaining is to be expected. Generally you can obtain a final figure of between 10-40 percent lower than the original asking price. Much depends on your skill and the shopkeeper's mood. Remember, Thais appreciate good manners and a sense of humour. With patience and a broad smile, you will not only get a better price, you will also enjoy shopping as an art.

Recommended shopping venues in Bangkok fixed price shopping

Bangkok has a number of quality department store chains such as Central Department Store, Robinson, the Mall, and Thai Daimaru. These are usually located in major shopping plazas or mega-malls dotted around the city. Slightly down-market stores that have proved popular recently are Big C and Lotus. Bangkok's top shoppers tend to frequent the following:

Peninsula Plaza (Ratchadamri Road)

Imported brand name labels, jewellery, top local fashion designers, gourmet shops.

Gaysorn Plaza (Ploenchit Road)

Imported brand name clothing, trendy restaurants, imported household furnishings.

The Emporium (Sukhumvit Road)

One of Bangkok's newest up-market shopping centres. It is twice the size of Peninsula and Gaysorn Plaza combined.

World Trade Centre (Ratchaprasong Intersection) Mega-mall where the young and trendy hang out. It includes stores, restaurants, cinemas, and an ice skating rink.

Thailand Duty-Free Shop

This is located on the seventh floor of the World Trade Centre. Featuring a wide range of quality products, the Duty Free Shop enables tourists and those going overseas to choose their purchases at leisure, pay for them and then collect them later at the airport prior to departure.

Future Park and Fashion Island

These large-scale centres located in the Rangsit and Minburi respectively feature both Central and Robinson department stores.

Seacon Square (Si Nakarin Road)

Mega-mall that draws crowds of suburban Bangkokians on weekends. It has everything for the whole family, including shops, cinemas, amusement park, wholesale supermarket, and restaurants.

Siam Centre/Discovery Centre (Rama I Road) Featuring mainly trendy fashions for the young and young-at-heart.

Narayana Phand (Ratchadamri Road, opposite World Trade Centre)

This is a good place for overseas visitors because it stocks every kind of handicraft at fixed prices on two floors.

Chitralada Shops

An outlet for Her Majesty the Queen's Support Foundation, the shops carry selections of superb handicraft items from evening bags woven from the *lipao* vine to embroidery, *mudmee* silk, and handbags made from silk or cotton. Ideal for gifts or as a special souvenir of Thailand.

Bargain Shopping

Pratunam Market and Bayoke Tower

(Pratunam Intersection). This is a centre for wholesale garments located in one of Bangkok's tallest buildings.

Chatuchak Weekend Market (Corner Phahonyothin and Wiphawadi-Rangsit roads)

Open only on Saturdays and Sundays, this market is a haven for browsers and dedicated shoppers alike. This is where you can buy about anything, from clothes and silver jewellery, to plants, food, antiques, and pets, to name but a few of the myriad available items.

Chinatown (Yaowarat Road)

Chinatown is an old business centre, with many small streets and alleys full of shops selling all types of goods, including wholesale items such as household goods, stationery, and toys. The area is always lively, and market stalls abound. There are many gold shops as well as restaurants and stores selling traditional Chinese foodstuffs. In the vicinity are the traditional Thieves Market and Phahurat Cloth market.

Patpong Night Market (Patpong Road)

Apart from the colourful night life, Patpong has a lively night market that overflows onto Silom Road. It tends to be a bit pricey unless you are a good bargainer.

River City Shopping Centre (Next to the Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel) This shopping centre is known for its quality antique stores and regular auctions. Most prices are negotiable. A Thailand Duty-Free Shop is located here.

Siam Square (Rama I Road)

Brims with restaurants including the trendy Hard Rock Cafe. As well as cinemas, book shops and speciality stores. Siam Square also has street markets selling clothes and accessories. Mostly frequented by teenagers.

Boe Bae Market

(Krungkasem Road). A wholesale clothing market where everything is sold by the dozen. Busiest in the morning, the market is active throughout the day.

8.6.3 Nightlife

When it comes to enjoying life to its fullest, the Thai people almost certainly lead the rest of the world. This is summed up in the Thai phrase *sanuk*, or having fun, and there is no doubt that it is this approach to everyday life that helps make Thailand such an enjoyable place to visit.

Thailand is full of opportunities to have a *sanuk* time, day and night. While Bangkok is the main centre of entertainment, every town and city has its share of activities dedicated to all sorts of fun and entertainment.

One of Bangkok's great attractions is dining out. The city is full of restaurants representing just about every cuisine on this earth. But no visit to Bangkok or Thailand would be complete without sampling the local cuisine at least once. Hot and spicy, and with a hint of Chinese, Indian, Malay and even Indonesian influences, Thai cuisine has established itself as one of the world's outstanding treats. Special mention should be made of seafood, for Thailand's seas are full of delicious fish and crustaceans, and a seafood meal is, for many visitors, the highlight of their stay.

Thai restaurants range from the very simple, on almost every street, to the sophisticated,

where a five-course meal is accompanied by a classical dance show. The city's hotels usually boast two or three restaurants, which are likely to include French, Chinese and, increasingly, Italian cuisine. There is, in addition, a huge selection of independent restaurants serving excellent European, Japanese, Middle Eastern and American food.

Bars and nightclubs can also be found in great numbers in Bangkok. The entertainment districts include Sukhumvit Soi 55 (Soi Thonglor), Royal City Avenue, Soi Sarasin and Soi 4 Silom Road. Bangkok also has its "red light" districts of Patpong (which also boasts a lively night market), Soi Cowboy, and the Nana Entertainment Plaza.

Western influences are reflected in the growing number of British-style pubs in Bangkok. These include Bobby's Arms, the Toby Jug, the Bull's Head and Delaney's. Several German-style bars have also opened, and micro-breweries are becoming popular.

Nightclubs tend to be large and on busy nights attract youngsters. The best known are Discovery and Taurus. Live music can be found in several hotels. Certain bars, particularly in the Soi Sarasin district, are dedicated to jazz and blues.

Concerts featuring international stars are becoming a more regular aspect of Bangkok's nightlife. Leading ballet troupes and opera singers have also made appearances here. The daily English-language newspapers, such as the *Bangkok Post* and the *Nation*, carry informative listings of what is going on.

The Bangkok Symphony Orchestra holds regular shows and frequently invites guest conductors from overseas.

Western plays are sometimes featured for short seasons at leading hotels while Thai plays can be seen at the Bangkok Playhouse (Tel: 319-7641-4) and Phatravadi Theatre (Tel: 412-7287/8).

Thailand's National Theatre, which is on Na Phra That Road next to the National Museum, features Thai classical dramas and international performances. Current programmes can be checked by telephoning the theatre (224-1342) on weekdays between 8:30 am and 4:30 pm. Located on Charoenkrung Road near the Old Siam Plaza is the Chalermsongkro Royal Theatre. Thai musical dance drama or "Khon", are staged from January to March. Plays occupy the rest of the time around the year. For the current programme, contact the theatre, Tel: 222-0434, 225-8757/8, 222-1753, 222-1854. The

Musical Art Centre is located in the same building as the Bangkok Bank's Phan Fa Branch. There are performances, discussions and activities on Fridays with free admission. Call 282-2396 for details.

For something completely different, visitors may like to watch Thai boxing. Known locally as *Muay Thai*, this spectacular sport has a growing following of fans worldwide, thanks to satellite and cable TV. Live performances are held on alternate nights at Ratchadamnoen Stadium and Lumpini Stadium.

The beach resort of Pattaya offers a similar line up of night time activities, though places like Chiang Mai, Phuket and Ko Samui rely mainly on the bar and restaurant scene.

8.6.4 Temple tours

Emerald Buddha, or Wat Phra Keo, Temple of the Emerald Buddha

This temple adjoins the Grand Palace and serves as the Royal Temple where the King

performs religious ceremonies. It includes a dazzling collection of gilded spires and pavilions and mythological gods. It is what most foreigners expect to see when they come to Thailand, and it is the single most powerful image visitors take away when they leave. The compound is open to the public free on Sundays and Buddhist holidays; on other days there is an admission charge.

To fully appreciate its splendour, Wat Phra Keo deserves at least two visits. The first should be on one of the non-public days, when admission is charged. At those times, the compound is relatively uncrowded, and you can wander about at leisure inspecting its serene treasures. The second visit, however, should be on a public day for only then can you witness the vital role the temple and its celebrated image play in the life of the Thai people. The ardent worshippers who fill the sanctuary prostrate themselves on the marble floor before the golden altar. The smell of floral offerings and burning joss sticks fills the air. High on its pedestal, the Emerald Buddha looks serenely down on the worshippers.

Wat Phra Keo was built by King Rama I in 1782, in imitation of the Royal Temple of the Grand Palace in Ayutthaya, to house the celebrated Phra Keo, or Emerald Buddha. No one knows the precise origin of this small 75-cm-high image, the most sacred in all Thailand, but some experts believe it to be of northern workmanship.

Today, in its blue-tiled sanctuary, the Emerald Buddha sits atop a gilded altar 10 metres high. Above it is an image of a nine-tiered umbrella. On either side are crystal balls representing the sun and the moon. Three times a year, at the beginning of each new season, the King changes the Emerald Buddha's robes: a golden diamond-studded tunic for the hot season, a gilded robe flecked with blue for the rainy season, and a robe of enamel-coated solid gold for the cool season.

In the compound of Wat Phra Keo are pavilions, *chedis* (pointed spires), *prangs* (rounded spires), and mythological gods and goddesses, most of which are gilded or encrusted with bits of porcelain or glass.

The walls of the cloister that surrounds the entire temple are painted with murals telling the story of the Rumakien, the Thai version of the Rumayana epic of Indian origin. The murals were painted during the reign of Rama III (1824-1850), and were restored by his two successors. In 1932, there was a more drastic restoration that inserted some Western influences into the classic Thai style.

On a broad, raised marble terrace – higher than the rest of the compound because it was built on the ruins of buildings destroyed by fire during the reign of Rama I – are the Royal Pantheon, the library (*Mondop*), and a golden *stupa* erected by Rama IV. *The Royal Pantheon* contains life-size statues of the kings of the present dynasty and is open to the public only once a year, on Chakri Day, 6 April. In front of it stand many marvellous gilded statues of mythological creatures, including the half-bird, half-woman *kinaree*. Behind the Pantheon is the library, surrounded by monuments commemorating the sacred white elephants, symbol of royal power, that were found in the kingdom during the reigns of the first five Chakri kings.

Marble Temple

The newest of the royal temples in Bangkok, *Wat Benchamabopit*, or the *Marble Temple*, was started by King Chulalongkorn in 1901 and was finished 10 years later, just after his death. The name means “Temple of the Fifth King.” It is also one of the most unusual. The architect, a half-brother of the king, made a number of departures from traditional style. The most obvious are the Carrara marble used on the main buildings; the enclosed courtyard; and the curved, yellow Chinese tiles of the roof. Two gigantic marble lions, or *singha*, guard the entrance to the *bot*.

The marble courtyard has a Renaissance quality, with clouds of pigeons that descend to eat bread thrown by visitors.

In the early morning and in the evening when the monks chant in the *bot*. In a gallery around the courtyard are 51 Buddha images, slightly larger than life-size. All the periods of Thai Buddhist art are represented, as well as art from China, India, Japan, and Tibet. The principal Buddha image is a replica of a famous one in Phitsanulok province called *Phra Buddha Chinaraaj*.

Through the rear entrance of the courtyard is a huge Bodhi tree, 70 years old. It was brought as a seedling from a tree in South Thailand that came from Buddha Gaya in India, the Buddha's birthplace. A canal filled with large turtles, released there by people wishing to earn merit separates the religious buildings from the monks' quarters where the present King spent his monkhood shortly after his coronation. Towards the front of the monks' section are the *Royal Ordination Pavilions*. These buildings were originally located inside the compound of the Grand Palace.

Temple of the Dawn, or Wat Arun, is across from Bangkok in the sister city of Thonburi. It is most easily reached by water-taxi from any of the piers along the river. The closest pier is at Tha Tien, just on the opposite bank, where boats leave frequently in the morning. It has recently undergone major renovations.

An older temple, Wat Chaeng, was on this site when King Taksin established his capital at Thonburi, and he used it as the royal temple. In the early years of the 19th century, King Rama II enlarged the temple and raise the central tower from 15 to its present 79 metres, making it one of the tallest religious structures in the country. Because of the soft earth, this engineering feat took years and was completed during the reign of his successor.

The great rounded spire is covered with pieces of multicoloured Chinese porcelain embedded in cement. After the builders ran out of porcelain, Rama III called upon his subjects to contribute any broken crockery they could find to complete the decoration; he was rewarded with thousands of pieces. Visitors can climb halfway up the tower and get a fine view of the temple compound and the river.

8.6.5 Sea caves

Nature has jealously guarded the magnificence of Thailand's sea caves that are surrounded with rocky bastions and high tide waters. Pathfinders found their way to these caves in the late 1980s, and tour companies sprang up to lead visitors to these sea caves via sea canoes and other craft.

Honeycombed with caves, hollows and recesses and furnished with mangrove forests and lagoons, a number of uninhabited isles off Phuket Island and Phang-Nga in the south present unparalleled – and unspoiled – geographical formations for canoe trips. The caves are shielded by the mainland and Phuket Island, easing the effects of seasonal monsoons.

Functioning like three big balloons attached together, sea canoes are safe since there is little chance that all three would get damaged simultaneously.

Even if the boats capsize, they will not submerge and passengers can hold onto them. They are unlikely to tip, though, since elastic rubber canoes can absorb the forces of charging waves and maintain their balance properly.

This is an eco-tour activity that is enjoyed in small groups. Catching the wave of pioneer Sea Canoe's success, several other companies have jumped into the business.

The first destination is usually Koh Hong. The yellow canoes are first inflated and then launched into the water. One guide is assigned for every two customers. These intensively-trained guides are responsible for manoeuvring and narrating useful information about the caves and rooms.

Sea Canoe Thailand Co., Ltd.

Tel: (076) 212-252

E-mail: sontaya@tseacanoec.com

Website: <http://www.seacanoec.com>

A day trip costs in the region of 2,675 baht

Overnight trips from three to six nights are also available.

8.6.6 Bird watching

Although bird watching has been popular among Thais for many years, only recently have overseas visitors joined in. Almost 1,000 different species of birds – some local, others that have migrating here – have been spotted in Thailand. Most of Thailand's national parks offer good opportunities for bird watching. Thailand's richness is owed to its geographical position as a "zoo crossroads" where mountain bird fauna, shared with the moist uplands around the south-eastern margins of the Tibetan Plateau, mingles with lowland forms.

While some birds may be seen all year, the best time is from January through to early May, during the dry season and the early part of the wet season, since it is then that most resident species are breeding, while many winter visitors are also resident.

Other locations include:

Wat Phailom

This riverside area is in Pathum Thani province. Many species such as the Asian Openbill Stork can be seen between November and April.

Songkhla Lake

This vast area in the south is the largest inland body of water in Thailand, and is rich in water bird life. People from all over the world come to see Thailand's indigenous birds and species migrate here. Boats with small and relatively quiet outboard engines can be hired from several points around the lake. Visitors may also reach the area from the town of Pattalung. Khu Khut Waterfowl Park, part of which is a non-hunting area, is home to flocks of waterfowl. The bird-watching season is between November and February.

Khao Yai National Park

Located in Nakhon Nayok province, this park was recently selected as an ASEAN National Heritage site. A total of 318 migrant and resident bird species have been identified.

Kaeng Krachan

Kaeng Krachan in Petchburi province is Thailand's largest national park but still relatively unknown. Bird-watchers can look for more than 250 confirmed species, among them the great hornbills and grey peacocks.

Doi Inthanon National Park

This park is near Chiang Mai town and is very popular with bird-watchers. More than 383 species have been reported.

Phru To Daeng Forest

Located in Narathiwat province, this is the largest peat swamp forest in Thailand. It has abundant in wildlife and rare natural forest.

8.6.7 River and canal cruises

River and canal cruises are a great way to enjoy the beauty and grandeur of the Chao Phraya River, the River of Kings, which flows from the central plains through Bangkok. Bangkok is laced with canals (*khlongs*), although there are not as many now as when the city earned the nickname the Venice of the East in the late 18th Century.

Trips along the Chao Phraya River

Boat services on the river are operated by two companies: Laem Thong Co. Ltd. and Chao Phraya Express Boat Co. Ltd. They travel from southern Bangkok to the northern district of Nonthaburi. Fares range from four to nine baht. Visitors wishing to travel further to Ko Kret, a small island in the River, can connect from the Nonthaburi pier where the express boats stop. The island features a pottery village and several temples.

Along Khlong Bangkok Noi

A boat service is operated from 6:30am to 11:00 pm. The boats depart from Tha Chang every half hour. The fare is 50 baht and the trip takes about 50 minutes. Sights include the Royal barge national Museum and several temples, and an excellent peek into Thai life on the river.

Individual boat operators also rent their services to visitors. They can usually be found near the major riverside hotels, such as the Oriental, the Sheraton, the Marriot Royal Garden Riverside, and the Shangri-La. Fares are negotiable in the region of 500 baht for two hours. Most of These hotels also offer night cruises, which include dinner. One of the most inexpensive, and one that is frequented by Thais, is that run by the Riverside Hotel, Tel: 434-0090, From Krung Thon to Rama IX bridges, daily at 8 p.m. Seventy baht per person, food ordered separately.

The ancient capital

A number of companies, including the leading hotels, offer luxury cruise packages to the former capital of Ayutthaya and the Bang Pa-in Summer Palace. Typically, the day trip involves a cruise up the river, a visit to the city ruins, and return to Bangkok by bus. Fares average about 1,500 baht per person, including lunch.

8.6.8 Adventure

On the water

White water rafting and kayaking have only recently become popular in Thailand, where bamboo rafting for a long time held sole sway. In the south, special sea canoes are used to explore caves, while inland, increasing numbers of operators run river trips. The best time to tackle the rivers is between October and March.

Mae Taeng, a tributary of the Ping River in Chiang Mai, is a favourite choice for rafters. The Pai River, at 180 kms, is the largest in Mae Hong Son. The Mae Kok River is 130 km long and runs through the heart of Chiang Rai province, eventually emptying into the Mekong River. It flows through jungles and over mountain cliffs, with several hilltribes living nearby. Regular rafting trips are organised from Chiang Rai to selected destinations, and also between Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai.

The Mae Klong River In Lampang province south of Chinag Mai takes visitors past the Thi Lor Jor waterfall, hot springs, and caves. The Takobi rapids add hair-raising excitement along

the way. In this area is also the beautiful Thi Lor Su waterfall, and the MaeTuen sanctuary, Mae Sot.

Other good river regions include Nakhon Nayok and Prachinburi to the northeast of Bangkok, Petchaburi and Kachanburi to the west, and Pitsanalok in the central region. A number of tour companies offer a variety of expeditions, some of which last several days with overnight accommodation in tents or local villages.

Nature and eco-tours

Growing quickly in popularity is a wide range of eco-tours, in which visitors seek to learn more about the country's nature and way of living. Traditionally, trekking has been the main form of nature tour in the country, taking in the mountains and jungles of northern and western Thailand, especially in the border regions that still boast pristine tropical forests, waterfalls, and rivers. Participants can stay overnight in small villages to experience the lifestyles of Thailand's hilltribe and nomadic people.

However, visitors now expect more, and want to learn how people make a living, their thoughts on the environment and how they have adapted themselves to live in harmony with it, and what beliefs and philosophies guide their lives.

The only way to do this is for the visitors to actually live among the people that them. Thailand has several eco-tourism sites:

Khong Jiam in Ubon Ratchathani in the northeast on the banks of the Mekong River; Mae Thaa Village in Lampang province, where visitors can take part in the daily life of a typical rural northern community; Khiriwong Village in Nakhon Sri Thammarat, where residents have established a system for governing themselves to become more self-sufficient.

Also becoming increasingly popular are mountain bike tours. Most are set in the mountains of the North, and include guides and, on certain tours, back-up vehicles carrying food and overnight equipment. Bikes are also widely available in major tourist destinations, where they can be rented at reasonable rates.

Cliff climbing is another environment-friendly activity that is increasingly popular. The favourite destinations are in the south, at Phang Nga, where towering limestone cliffs provide the perfect challenge, and Krabi.

Hiking/Trekking

The vast open spaces of northern Thailand make it an ideal area for hiking, particularly during the cool season from October to February. Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai are trekking centres in the North. Particularly popular are trekking tours in the mountainous area near Thailand's border with Myanmar and Laos. Knowledgeable guides are provided and indeed are advisable. Tours can include overnight stays in simple forest lodges or hilltribe villages.

Doi Inthanon National Park near Chiang Mai includes Thailand's highest mountain, and is a popular venue for hiking. Phu Kradung in the northeastern province of Loei has long been popular with campers and hikers. The park consists of tableland rising between 1,200-1,500 metres, crowned by a 60 square kilometre plateau on which temperate zone plants flourish. It is a three to four hour hike to the top, where trails lead to scenic viewpoints, waterfalls and the main campsite.

Khao Yai National Park, located in central Thailand two hours drive from Bangkok, this is the largest of all Thailand's nature reserves. It has many established trails which take hikers through tropical forest, scrubland and up steep hills. The park is an ASEAN Natural Heritage Site.

8.7: National parks

Thailand has more than 60 protected reserves, and almost all of the country's remaining natural forests, along with most of its wild life, are now found in protected areas which cover 11 percent of the country. The parks cover an extraordinary range of terrain and feature an unrivalled diversity of flora and fauna in Asia.

Khao Yai

This is Thailand's first, best known and most famous national park. Khao Yai's attractions include a wealth of wildlife, and some of the largest areas of seasonal tropical forest left on mainland Asia.

Established in 1962, Khao Yai became the Kingdom's first national park and it remains the third largest in the system. Its 2,172 square kilometres include parts of four provinces: Nakhon Ratchasima, Saraburi, Nakhon Nayok and Prachinburi.

As the source of seven major streams, Khao Yai also represents one of the most important watershed areas for surrounding provinces and beyond.

The park is near the most westerly part of the Dongrak Mountain Range, with its highest peak, Khao Rom, rising to 1,351 metres. The highest region is in the north and west of the park, but much of Khao Yai is sandstone plateau with elevations between 600 and 1,000 meters. The plateau slopes gently towards the south and east.

Best known for its elephants, gibbons and hornbills, the park contains at least 25 types of larger mammals including Asian jackal, Asiatic black bear, Malayan sun bear, Javan mongoose, hog badger, civet, tiger, leopard, clouded leopard, golden cat, marbled cat, wild pig, guar, mouse deer, barking deer, sambar, serow and slow loris. It is possible that as many as 200 Asiatic elephants still exist, more than found in other protected areas in Thailand. Some 40 other, mostly smaller mammal species have been confirmed to also exist.

Khao Yai has about 50 kilometres of marked trails, most of them originally stamped out and still used by elephants. The trails are confined to a relatively small, central area of the park to keep the rest of Khao Yai as pristine as possible. They are the best developed nature trails in Thailand. Hikers will encounter a great variety of landscape, vegetation and wildlife. The sudden appearance of an elephant, the tracks of tigers at salt licks, a view over grasslands towards distant peaks and the constant sense of teeming life are some of the pleasures of Khao Yai.

The park is 200 kilometres from Bangkok, about two hours by car. Because of Khao Yai's popularity, it is advisable to make bookings well in advance, especially for Friday and Saturday nights and holidays. The limited park accommodation comprises dormitories at Ya Wachon Camp about two kilometres from park headquarters. For campers, there is one site at Pa Kluai Mai on the road to Hew Suwat Waterfall. Royal Forestry bungalows are available by arrangement with the department in Bangkok, but government officials and special interest groups generally get priority.

The more affluent can stay at several upmarket resorts located 15 to 25 minutes drive north. Hotels and resorts have sprung up both in and close to Pak Chong, some of them offering guide service into the park.

Khao Sok

Khao Sok Rainforest Resort is along the beautiful Klong Sok river just 100 metres upstream from the bridge which leads to the National Park Headquarters. Khao Sok National Park is easily accessible from Phuket, Krabi or Surat Thani by rental car, taxi, or bus. If you are arriving on your own, the entrance is well marked at Km 109 of Highway 401. The trip from Phuket International Airport takes about two hours. Travel time from Krabi and Surat Thani is somewhat shorter.

Green, misty, and alive with jungle sounds, Khao Sok is Southern Thailand's premier rainforest reserve. Gibbons call from the treetops; brilliant beaked hornbills fly above the emerald canopy; wild elephants roam free over lush mountainsides, while tigers, leopards, and jungle cats stalk their prey by night. More than 48 species of mammals, 184 species of birds and thousands of trees and plants have been recorded here. and there are many discoveries yet to be made.

This is the only place in Thailand, and one of very few places in the world, where *Rafflesia*, the world's largest flower at 80 cm, grows.

Ao Phangnga National Park

Islands in a calm bay present visitors to this marine park, a 401-square-kilometre gallery of immense natural sculptures. Phang-Nga is one of Thailand's most photogenic wonders.

Established 1981, Phangna Marine National Park lies in the sheltered waters north and east of Phuket Island. Its pale, milky-green water is the setting for more than 40 spectacular islands. These forms rise 300 metres and more, sheer stone monoliths caved out of the limestone over time and fringed with jungle. The cliffs are stained rust and brown, black and cream, their faces holed with sea caves left exposed when the sea dropped from levels scores of metres higher than those of today.

The islands of Phang-Nga are part of a geological feature which extends all the way from Krabi to the southern provinces of China. Deciduous limestone scrub forest crowns most of the islands and the mainland. Taller, evergreen forest is found in the valleys, where the soil is deeper and richer. Plants such as pandanus, elegant cycade, euphorbs and prickly pear cactus establish themselves even on the sheer cliff faces, sending their roots into the tiniest cracks and subsisting on rainwater or merely on the humidity.

Mangrove swamps are between the islands and around the estuaries, but most of the area's coast mangroves are outside the park boundary. Those inside are largely degraded, and illegal exploitation continues. The 1989 logging ban in Thailand excluded mangrove forests, many of which are outside protected zones and parcelled out to concessionaires. The average annual temperature is 23 C, with the hottest period in March and April. November through February is the most comfortable season. Average annual rainfall is 2,380 millimetres, most of which falls from May to October.

The bay has been growing in popularity as a yachting destination. Its waters remain calm year-round. Islands such as Koh Phanak and Koh Hong are favourite overnight anchorage for sailing yachts.

Hidden worlds of tropical flora and fauna only recently discovered from the air, the so-called *hongs* appear to be collapsed cave systems. They are open to the sky and surrounded by limestone walls.

Of similar interest are Tham Lod Yai, Tham Lod Lek and Koh Talu, cave-like passages through eroded limestone archways, with curtains of overhanging stalactites.

The park is 96 kilometres from the town of Phuket and about nine kilometres from the town of Phang-Nga.

Boat tours may be arranged from Phang-Nga or Phuket. Protected from both the northeast and the southwest monsoons, Phang-Nga Bay is always calm. Nevertheless, the recommend season is November to May, when the consistently sunny weather best shows the striking scenery.

The Royal Forestry Department offers nine guesthouses which sleep from five to 15 people. Camping sites are also available, although visitors are expected to have their own camping equipment.

Ang Thong National Park

Some 40 islands compose Ang Thong National Park, the country's second marine reserve and one of the loveliest sea and island combinations in the Gulf of Thailand.

Ang Thong, or "Golden Basin," extends over an area of 102 square kilometres and lies 31 kilometres west of Koh Samui, Surat Thani Province, in the Gulf of Thailand.

Established in 1980, the scenery is dominated by limestone outcrops caved by erosion into striking forms and largely overgrown by-thick rainforest. They rise to as high as 400 metres.

Although the Ang Thong group has been designated a marine national park since 1980, provided some protection, there has been significant damage from tour boats anchoring and from the collection a coral and shellfish.

On the islands, the lower slopes of the limestone hills are covered with thick virgin forest. At higher levels, the vegetation thins to scrub forest and smaller plants. Most trees are deciduous. They grow in the limestone soil which does not hold moisture year-round, and shed their leaves in the cool season. Trees like ironwood, rubber, and sappanwood are typical.

Ang Thong supports various orchids, some of them rare and endangered. One stand out is the Lady's Slipper, which has lovely white petals dotted with violet and which grows on island rocks and cliffs. The orchids bloom in September.

Ang Thong is best visited from February through to May, since both the northeast and the southwest monsoon seasons bring a great deal of rain in October to February and May to September.

Koh Mae Koh, one of the major islands in the archipelago is the setting for Thale Nai, an emerald saltwater lake surrounded by sheer cliffs. Koh Mae Koh offers a good beach for swimming and sunbathing.

Regular passenger boats leave from Talad Ban Don Harbour, in Surat Thani, and from Koh Samui. Daytrips by boat are organised from Samui.

Government accommodation is available on Koh Wua Talab and tents may also be rented. Five guesthouses each sleep from ten to 20 persons. Two dormitories can accommodate up to a total of 40 guests.

Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park

The park is known for some of the best shoreline habitats in Thailand. It is on the east coast of the southern peninsula in Prachuab Khiri Khan Province.

Limestone hills plunge into the Gulf of Thailand at Khao Sam Roi Yot, or the Mountain of Three Hundred Peaks. The highest hills rise to 605 meters. Several caves, fine beaches and an extensive marsh are other major attractions.

The 98-square-kilometer park was established in 1966 although the area has a far longer human history. It was near here that the multi-talented Rama IV observed a total eclipse of the sun which he had accurately predicted would occur on Aug. 18, 1868.

About 40 percent of the park is mixed-species deciduous forest on foothills. The hills are dotted with dwarf evergreen trees. The valleys and marsh cover 30 percent of the park. There are two square kilometres of mud flats.

Praya Nakhon Cave can be reached in about hour from the village of Bang Pu. Phraya Nakhon contains two large sinkholes and a pavilion built for a 1896 visit by King Rama V. The cave is named after Phraya Nakhon, who discovered it some two centuries ago when he was forced ashore by a violent storm. He was the ruler of the then independent city-state of Nakhon Sri Thammarat on the southern peninsula of Thailand.

The park is 320 kilometres south of Bangkok. The Forestry Department provides seven bungalows at park headquarters and near the Phraya Nakhon Cave with campsites at each of these locations. Superb beaches and beach resorts are within easy reach of the park, including Pranburi, Hua Hin and Cha-am. Tours of the park are run from some hotels in Hua Hin and Cha-am.

8.8: Ancient sites and prehistoric ruins

The most significant site for ancient ruins is in the country Ban Chiang, a small village 50 kilometres east of Udon Thani town. Archaeological discoveries in the 1970s produced evidence of a Bronze Age civilisation that flourished over 5,000 years ago. This predates sites in China and Mesopotamia as the earliest known evidence of an agrarian, bronze-making culture, and suggests that the Khorat plateau is one of the possible “cradles of civilisation”.

One of the excavation pits at Ban Chiang has been left open to display skeletal remains and distinctively patterned pottery. There is also a museum with some artifacts. More finds are displayed at Khon Kaen’s museum.

Another ancient site is Pha Taem in the Khong Chiam district of Ubon Ratchathani. Here prehistoric rock paintings extend for over one-and-a-half kilometres along a cliff face overlooking the Mekong River.

The Northeast possesses the finest examples of ancient Khmer temples outside Cambodia. Four of the best monuments can be reach by day excursions from Nakhon Ratchasima town. About 60 kilometres north of the town is Phimai, the most famous of the Khmer sites. The 12th Century temple complex has been restored by Thailand’s Fine Arts Department to its original grandeur.

Just 15 kilometres north of Nakhon Ratchasima is the smaller Khmer temple ruin of Prasat Phanom Wan. Its architectural features are complemented by a tranquil setting and the fact that the temple is still used for Buddhist worship.

East of Nakhon Ratchasima are the ruins of Prasat Phanom Rung. A 12th-Century structure, Phanom Rung is a well-preserved Khmer temple complex, its superb architecture enhanced by a hill-top location with panoramic views of the countryside.

For a historical, topographic and cultural season, the Thai towns that border the Mae Khong River, from Nong Khai in the north down to Mukdahan, are well worth touring. That Phanom, a small town south of Nakhon Phanom, contains the Northeast's most sacred shrine, Phra That Phanom, virtually all these towns have temples of historic and architectural interest.

Nearby are the smaller ruins of Parsat Muang Tam. With 10th-Century foundations, the temple predates Phanom Rung. Although less well preserved, its state of abandoned beauty gives it a romantic atmosphere.

Ayutthaya

Ayutthaya was the capital of old Siam from the mid-14th Century until 1767. Today, Ayutthaya is a bustling country town stretching from the Pridi Damrong Bridge to beyond the Chandrakasem Palace. Ayutthaya is located 85 km north of Bangkok.

The ancient capital was carefully chosen to make it defensible by locating it at the junction of three rivers. A canal was cut across the loop of the Chao Phraya to convert Ayutthaya into an island. In the four centuries following its foundation in 1350, many temples and palaces linked by canals were erected on and around the island. Its opulence enticed the Burmese to sack it in 1767.

There are frequent riverboat connections with Ayutthaya from Bang Pa-in. A pleasant way to travel is by road to Bang Pa-in and thence by water. Alternatively, bus and train services run from Bangkok, both taking 1 1/2 hours. It takes 90 minutes from Bangkok by road. It is also possible to travel all the way to Ayutthaya by riverboat, and tours can be arranged in Bangkok (see separate section).

As you start out on your boat tour, close to the junction of the Nam Pasak and Chao Phraya Rivers you pass the imposing Wat Phanan Choeng. Founded 26 years before Ayutthaya, it houses a huge seated Buddha, so tightly crowded against the roof that he appears to be holding it up. Wat Phanan Choeng was a favourite of the Chinese traders of Ayutthaya who prayed there before setting out on long voyages. It still has an unmistakably Chinese atmosphere.

Upstream from Wat Phanan Choeng, the restored Wat Buddhalsawan stands serenely on the riverbank. Farther upstream, the restored Catholic Cathedral of St. Joseph is a reminder of Ayutthaya's large European population when the city when it was in its prime. At the bend of the river stands one of Ayutthaya's most romantic ruins, Wat Chai Wattanarain. A Buddha keeps solitary watch, perched on a pedestal. They make a fine contrast to the restored Memorial to Queen Surlyothai on the other side of the river. The Ayutthaya queen, dressed as a man, accompanied her king into battle and gave her life to save his.

Chandrakasem Palace was known as the Palace of the Front, and was originally constructed outside the city walls. It had an important, defensive function in that it was built by King Naresuan, the first ruler of Ayutthaya, to gain control over their northern rival, Chiang Mai. The Burmese burnt down the palace but King Mongkut later rebuilt it. It now houses a small museum.

The old royal palace, Wang Luang, was leveled by the Burmese. The bricks were removed to Bangkok to rebuild the Thai capital, so now only scattered foundations among the trees mark the palace site. Close by is the royal temple of Wat Phrn Sri Sanphet, enclosed within the area of Wang Luang, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha stands within the Grand Palace compound in Bangkok. The gold leafed Buddha, *Phra Sri Sanphei*, that gave the *wat* its name, was irreparably damaged by the Burmese. Today the three central *chedis* of the *wat* have been restored and stand in regal contrast to the surrounding ruins.

Wat Phra Ram is one of the older temples and was built in 1369 by the son of Ayutthaya's founder. Elephant gates still stand around the old walls. The central terrace is dominated by a crumbling *prang* to which cling a gallery of stucco *nagas*, garudas (mythical sun-birds), and statues of the Buddha. Wat Phra Ram's *prang* shimmers, reflected in the pool, Beung Phra Ram, that almost surrounds the temple. Once a marshy swamp, the pool was dug out to provide fill for the temple sites.

Two of Ayutthaya's finest temples stand side-by-side across the lake from Wat Phra Ram. Built by the seventh king of Ayutthaya as a memorial to his brothers, Wat Raj Burana contained many fine images and items of royal jewelry which were discovered during a 1958 restoration. The two *chedis* at the crossroads contain the ashes of the royal brothers, Princes Ai and Yo. Across the road, Wat Mehathat has little remaining apart from the base of its huge *prang*. Originally built to a height of 46 meters, it later collapsed. The people of Ayutthaya rebuilt it four meters higher.

North of Ayutthaya, the Phu Kao Thong Temple, better known as the Golden Mount Chedi, towers over the flat countryside. Its upper terraces command a pastoral view of the rice paddies. Built by the Burmese after their earlier and less destructive conquest in 1569, it was later remodelled by the Siamese in their own style. To mark 2,500 years of Buddhism, a 2,500-gram gold ball was mounted on top of the *chedi* spire in 1956.

A short distance down river from Ayutthaya is Bang Pa-In, a charming collection of palaces and pavilions once used by the kings of Thailand as a summer retreat. The rulers of Ayutthaya used Bang Pa-in in the hot season starting in the 17th Century, but the buildings one sees today date from the late 19th and early 20th-Century reigns of Rama V and Rama VI, who used to travel from Bangkok. A pretty palace on a lake, in a mixture of Italian and Victorian styles is closed to the public. But visitors can also see an ornate Chinese-style palace in which the king stayed during visits. A Thai style pavilion called the Aisawan Tippaya Asna in the middle of the lake, is regarded as one of the finest examples of Thai architecture.

Sukhothai

The ancient city of Sukhothai is 12 kms northeast of present day Sukhothai. One enters old Sukhothai through the Kamphang-hak, or "Broken Wall" Gate. The remains of the massive walls reveal that the capital was protected by three rows of earthen ramparts and two moats.

A short distance from Kamphang-hak Gate is the Ramkamhaeng National Museum, a good starting point for a tour. It contains a collection of Sukhothai sculpture, ceramics, and other artefacts, and also exhibits from other periods. The entrance hall is dominated a bronze image of the walking Buddha. This style of image is regarded as the finest sculptural innovation of the Sukhothai period (1230-1440).

In this period, the Thais adopted Theravada Buddhism and invited monastic help from Sri Lanka. But Hindu influence remained strong as is shown by the two bronze images of Hindu gods which flank the walking Buddha. Also worth noting is a stone torso of an Apsara, or divinity, in the Khmer style.

An important object displayed on the mezzanine floor is copy of the famous stone inscription of King Ramkamhaeng. It has been the most prized exhibit of the National Museum in Bangkok. In 1833, Crown Prince Mongkut discovered the stone, which had been inscribed in the year 1292. On it, King Ramkamhaeng recorded his conquests in surrounding kingdoms and in 1283 he devise the Siamese alphabet. Once situated on the No Prasat was the stone throne of King Ramkamhaeng. The stone throne, called the Manangasila, now in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok.

Within the walls of Sukhothai are the ruins of some 20 wats and monasteries. The greatest of them is Wat Mahathat. It is not definitely known who founded this shrine, but it is reasonable to assume that it was King Sri Indraditya (1220-1250), the first king of the Sukhothai dynasty. Wat Mahathat owes its present form to remodelling completed by King Lo Thai around 1345. The four axial towers, which can still be seen, are in the Khmer style. The principle Buddha image, cast in bronze by King Li Thai (1347-1368), is now in Bangkok at Wat Sukhothai. The stucco frieze of walking monks around the base of the main tower is unusual.

Wat Sri Sawal, southwest of Wat Mahathat, was originally a Hindu shrine which contained an image of Siva. Triple towers remain, built in a modified Khmer style; the stucco decoration, shows mythical birds and divinities.

Wat Sra Sri, on the way to the southern gate of the city has a spire of the Sri Lankan type. The ordination hall lies on an island to the east of the spire. The ruins of the main shrine consist of six rows of columns, which lead up to a well-restored seated Buddha image.

Leaving the walled city by the northern San Luang, or "Royal Shrine," gate and travelling about a kilometre, visitors arrive at the important shrine of Wat Plira Phal Luang. It originally consisted of three laterite towers covered with stucco, and was probably built in the late 12th Century when Sukhothai was still part of the Khmer empire. This shrine might have been the original centre of Sukhothai, since Wat Mahathat is of a later period. A seated stone Buddha image, dated to 1191 was found here. It is in the Ramkamhaeng Museum.

Beyond Wat Phra Phai Luang is Wat Si Chum, which has one of the largest seated Buddha images in the Kingdom. The enclosing shrine was built in the 14th Century. The image itself, called Phra Achana, or "The Venerable," is believed to be the one mentioned in King Ramkamhaeng's inscription. There is a stairway within the walls of the shrine leads to a space behind the head of the image. The ceiling of the stairway is made up of more than 50 carved slate slabs illustrating scenes from Buddhist folklore. They transform the ritual climbing of the stairs into a symbolic ascent to Buddha-hood. South of the walled city is another group of shrines and monasteries. One of the most interesting is Wat Chetupon, where the protecting wall of the *viharn* is made of slate slabs shaped as to appear to be wood. The gates are also formed of huge slabs of slate which was mined in the nearby hills. On the central tower of Wat Chetupon are Buddha images in the standing, reclining, walking, and sitting postures.

Many other monuments are to be found in this western area. They were probably built by monks from Sri Lanka. Another monument, not far from the western gate of Sukhothai, is Wat Pa Mamuang, where King Li Thai installed a famous monk of the Theravada sect in 1361. Still standing are the foundations of the shrine and the ruins of the main *chedi*.

8.9: Beauty, spas, herbs and hospitals

Thailand has a long tradition of natural healing and healthcare that has been developed and refined over centuries. The emphasis on health can be found in many aspects of Thai life. It manifests itself in Thai cooking, where there is a widespread use of medicinal herbs; in traditional massage offered across the country, and in spas, health resorts and beauty salons where the modern equipment and techniques are blended with natural herbs and local wisdom. State-of-the-art hospitals are equipped with the most sophisticated accessories available, complemented with highly qualified and compassionate staff.

In Thailand traditional healing has always sought to treat the whole person – body, mind and spirit. For this reason, massage and simple meditation are usually combined in any treatment, be it a simple haircut or facial.

Beauty

As mentioned above, beauty treatment seldom comes on its own, it is generally a part of a broader programme to soothe the soul as well as the body. Beauty care generally includes acupressure, body wraps, recontouring, manicure, herbal steam bathes, and treatment for hair, skin and face. Many of the beauty care institutes in Thailand have received international recognition.

Meditation

Thai society is based on a foundation of Buddhist teachings that emphasise three characteristics of existence: The changing nature of all things, the consequences of becoming attached to things in the world that one cannot control, and the absence of a stable, unchanged self.

Meditation is training the mind to move from self-centredness to a greater concern for things beyond oneself, such as truth, love, compassion and peace. The two main divisions of Buddhist meditation are *samatha* and *vipassana*. The former is usually rendered as calmness or concentration meditation, while the latter translates as insight meditation.

Breathing is an integral part of meditation and one can judge one's state of physical health and relaxation by listening to one's breathing. When we breathe, energy is created and flows through the body. Controlling and focussing while breathing can direct beneficial energy to areas which are not functioning properly, and where oxygenated blood revitalises organs and eliminated toxins.

Meditation teachings available in Thailand range from short introductory workshops to intensive retreats lasting several days. One of the most popular retreat programmes is at Suan Mokkh Forest Monastery in the southern province of Surat Thani (see listings).

Spas

Broadly, spas fall into four categories – day spas, resort spas, amenity spas and destination spas.

Day spas

These encompass the many beautician-type shops that offer short-term beauty treatments, facials and pedicures.

Resort spas

Resort spas are places where people go for the beauty of the location and luxury accommodation, but where there is a strong emphasis on a wide range of health and beauty treatments and facilities. A prime example in Thailand is the Banyan Tree Phuket, which in 1998 was voted the best resort spa in the world by 26,000 *Cond Nest Traveller* readers. A feature of the resort is its 46 spa pool villas built in enclosed garden compounds, each with private swimming pool and jacuzzi.

Amenity spas

These provide a temporary refuge from one's daily life and its associated stresses. In bustling Bangkok, for example, most leading hotels offer a range of amenities to help one relax, including a gymnasium, aerobic studio, sauna, steam room, jacuzzi, hair salon, as well as physical assessment room.

Destination spas

These are stand-alone, dedicated health farms that people visit explicitly to undergo treatments and therapies, as opposed to health and beauty facilities attached to hotels. Hua Hin's exclusive Chiva-Som International Health Resort is the only one of its kind in Asia, and

in late 1999 was voted the best in the world in the prestigious *Cond Nest Traveller Awards*. A feature of the resort is the delicate way in which it blends the latest technology with Eastern wisdom.

Private hospitals

Thai hospitality is renowned around the world, what is less well known is the high standard of private health services. With highly-qualified medical staff and the latest technology, Thailand's private hospitals add a new dimension to its tradition of hospitality. Overseas trained doctors and specialists and multi-lingual staff ensure a rewarding visit at competitive prices. Many private hospitals have partnerships with first-class international medical schools and healthcare institutions. (See the listings for recommended hospitals).

Medicinal plants and herbs

A fertile tropical country, Thailand has an abundance of food resources. The tropical and rain forests provide 255 recorded edible plants, of which 200 have medicinal properties in their roots, leaves, flowers and fruit.

Traditional medicine relies on the health-giving qualities of forest plants, while most of the ingredients used in Thai cooking have medicinal benefits, such as chillies, ginger, lemongrass, bergamot and lime leaves not only provide a distinctive taste, but also stimulate the digestive system.

The herbs used in daily meals contain the properties that are said to constitute the four elements – earth, wind, water and fire, which are said to make up the human constitution. Earth is acidic, sweet, oily and salty, wind is chilli hot, fire is bitter and water is sour. *Nam phrik*, the condiment found on every Thai table, integrates all taste sensations, sour, and salty, sweet and savoury, hot and spicy.

Herbs

Some of the typical herbs and spices used in Thai cuisine include the following:

Chilli (Phrik)

Chilli is an erect, branched, shrub-like herb with fruits used as garnishing and flavouring. There are many different species. All contain capsaicin, a biologically active ingredient beneficial to the respiratory system, blood pressure and heart. Other therapeutic uses include aiding the digestive system.

Cumin (Yi-ra)

Cumin is a small shrubby herb, the fruit of which contains a two to four percent volatile oil with a pungent odour, and which is used as a flavouring and condiment. Cumin's therapeutic properties manifest as a stomachic, bitter tonic, carminative, stimulant and astringent.

Garlic (Kra-thiam)

Garlic is an annual herbaceous plant with underground bulbs comprising several cloves. Dried mature bulbs are used as a flavouring and condiment. The bulbs contain a 0.1-0.36 percent garlic oil and organic sulphur compounds. Therapeutic uses are as an anti-microbial, diaphoretic, diuretic, expectorant, anti-flatulence and cholesterol lowering agents.

Ginger (Khing)

Ginger is an erect plant with thickened, fleshy and aromatic rhizomes. Used in different forms as a food, flavouring and spice. Ginger's rhizomes contain a one to two percent volatile oil. Ginger's therapeutic uses are as a carminative, anti-nauseant and anti-flatulence agent.

Galanga (Kha)

Greater Galanga is an erect annual plant with aromatic, ginger-like rhizomes, and commonly used as a flavouring. The approximately 0.04 percent volatile oil content has therapeutic uses as carminative, stomachic, anti-rheumatic and anti-microbial agents.

Hoary Basil (Maeng-lak)

Hoary Basil is an annual herbaceous plant with slightly hairy and pale green leaves, eaten either raw or used as a flavouring, and containing approximately 0.7 percent volatile oil. Therapeutic benefits include the alleviation of cough symptoms, and as diaphoretic and carminative agents.

Kaffir (Ma-krut)

The leaves, peels and juice of the Kaffir Lime are used as a flavouring. The leaves and peel contain a volatile oil. The major therapeutic benefit of the juice is as an appetiser.

Krachai

This erect annual plant with aromatic rhizomes and yellow-brown roots is used as a flavouring. The rhizomes contain approximately 0.8 percent volatile oil. The plant has stomach ache relieving and anti-microbial properties, and therapeutic benefits as an anti-tussive and anti-flatulence agent.

Lemon Grass (Ta-khrai)

This erect annual plant resembles a coarse grey-green grass. Fresh leaves and grass are used as flavouring. Lemongrass contains a 0.2-0.4 volatile oil. Therapeutic properties are as a diurectic, emmanagogue, anti-flatulence, anti-flu and anti-microbial agent.

Lime (Ma-nao)

Lime is used principally as a garnish for fish and meat dishes. The fruit contains Hesperidin and Naringin, scientifically proven anti-inflammatory agents. Lime juice is used as an appetiser, and has anti-tussive, anti-flu, stomachic and anti-scorbutic properties.

Marsh Mint (Sa-ra-nae)

The fresh leaves of this herbaceous plant are used as a flavouring and eaten raw in Thai cuisine. Volatile oil contents give the plant several therapeutic uses, including carminative, mild antiseptic, local anaesthetic, diaphoretic and digestant properties.

Pepper (Phrik-Thai)

Pepper is a branching, perennial climbing plant from whose fruiting spikes both white and black pepper are obtained. Used as a spice and condiment, pepper contains a two to four percent volatile oil. Therapeutic uses are as carminative, antipyretic, diaphoretic and diuretic agent.

Sacred Basil (Ka-phrao)

Sacred Basil is an annual herbaceous plant that resembles Sweet Basil but has narrower and often times reddish-purple leaves. The fresh leaves, which are used as a flavouring, contain approximately 0.5% volatile oil, which exhibits antimicrobial activity, specifically as a carminative, diaphoretic, expectorant and stomachic.

Shallot (Hom, Hom-lek, Hom-daeng)

Shallots, or small red onions, are annual herbaceous plants. Underground bulbs comprise garlic-like cloves. Shallot bulbs contain a volatile oil, and are used as flavouring or seasoning agents. Therapeutic properties include the alleviation of stomach discomfort, and as an anti-helminthic, anti-diarrhoeal, expectorant, anti-tussive, diuretic and anti-flu agent.

Sweet Basil (*Ho-ra-pha*)

Sweet Basil is an annual herbaceous plant, the fresh leaves of which are either eaten raw or used as a flavouring. Volatile oil content varies according to different varieties. Therapeutic properties are as carminative, diaphoretic, expectorant, digestant and stomachic agents.

Turmeric (*Kha-min*)

Turmeric is a member of the ginger family, and provides yellow colouring for Thai food. The rhizomes contain a three to four percent volatile oil with unique aromatic characteristics.

Turmeric's therapeutic properties manifest as a carminative, anti-flatulence and stomachic.

Aromatherapy and essential oils

Aromatherapy, the therapeutic use of aromatic substances, is a holistic treatment that combines massage with essential plant oils. Of the many plants found in Thailand, the following are said to have a range of healing effects. Bergamot reduces stress, camomile calms and cools, geranium restores balance and harmony, jasmine lifts the spirit, while lemon helps one concentrate. Peppermint on the other hand keeps one focussed, rose soothes, rosemary stimulates, sandalwood inspires new ideas, *ylang-ylang* relaxes, and is a mild aphrodisiac.

8.10: Traditional Thai massage

Traditional Thai massage – *nuad phan boran* – originated 2,500 years ago. It combines yoga and acupuncture techniques, manipulating the body's internal energy by using pressure points and yoga positions.

Massage techniques are known to alleviate disorders such as epilepsy, the early stages of paralysis and speech defects, as well as common ailments, including fevers, headache, backache, stomach and general tension. Thai massage should be considered as a spiritual practice closely connected to the teachings of the Lord Buddha. It should ideally be performed in a meditative state, only then can the masseur read the energy flows in the body. In this regard, the masseuses plying their trade on the beaches of Thailand are a worthy investment.

Key elements of a good massage

- Both the giver and recipient should remain mentally concentrated on the present moment as much as possible.
- Each pressure, whether from the thumbs, palms, knees or feet, must be slow but firm with a flowing movement.
- The speed and rhythm of movement should be slow, even and continuous.
- The receiver should keep his eyes closed but his attention on the experience.
- When the recipient feels the pressure being exerted, especially on the back or abdominal areas, he or she should exhale. To inhale creates resistance and discomfort.
- After the massage, the recipient should not get up immediately or undertake strenuous activity. A few minutes should be spent resting quietly to fully absorb the effects of the massage.

A variation on the traditional massage is a herbal Thai massage involving the application of hot compresses to different parts of the body. The warmth and soothing aroma of the herbs are extremely relaxing and revitalising.

Foot reflexology

This is a technique of treating the entire body by massaging reflex points in the foot. By stimulating them, it eases swollen legs, puffy ankles, dissolves backache and increases circulation of energy, blood and lymph to and from the vital organs.

Acupressure

This technique uses the same system of pressure points as acupuncture, the difference being that it relies on the fingers instead of the needle. One can feel the acupoints as small hollows just below the surface of the skin. Massaging them creates heat that is converted into tiny electrical charges. This stimulates the nerves and the muscles, and unblocks the energy pathways, known as meridians. The flow of energy throughout the body restores balance within the system.

8.11: Facilities for the elderly

If the body and mind are willing, there is no reason why an elderly visitor to the Kingdom cannot enjoy everything the country has to offer. Increasingly popular with elderly tourists are spa facilities, and the private hospitals (see above). This is particularly so for elderly Japanese visitors, who often visit for three months at a time to rejuvenate themselves at the country's many health institutions.

A potential drawback for elderly visitors is the heat, which reaches extremes of 40 degrees Celsius at the height of the hot season in April. However, there is no shortage of air-conditioned taxis, restaurants, hotels and shopping malls to overcome any hardship.

8.12: Attractions profiled by region

8.12.1 Central Thailand

Central Thailand is dominated by Bangkok, but to truly appreciate and understand Thailand, one must experience the rural and provincial areas.

West of Bangkok is Kanchanaburi province, site of the infamous Bridge over the River Kwai, built by allied POWs and conscripted Asian workers during World War II. The area is one of exceptional natural beauty, defined by forests, mountains, and the wooded valleys of the Kwai Noi and Kwai Yai rivers.

On the way to Kanchanaburi are the famous Floating Market and the Phra Pathom Chedi, the world's tallest Buddhist monument. Also en route are the Rose Garden, a country resort and cultural centre that gives a good introduction to traditional Thai life, and the Samphran Elephant Grounds and Zoo.

Stretching north of Bangkok are the Central Plains, a fertile area with patchworks of emerald-green rice paddies. In the heart of this region, 80 kilometres from Bangkok, is Ayutthaya. This was the Thai capital for 400 years until its destruction in 1767. The ruins of numerous temples offer an insight into what was once the largest, most magnificent city in the Orient.

Further north from Ayutthaya is Lop Buri. Scattered around the town are ruins dating from the Khmer period and from the 17th century, when King Narai held court here.

A popular family attraction is the Crocodile Farm, 30 kilometres southwest of Bangkok. With 30,000 reptiles, it is the largest farm of its kind in the world.

Not far from the Crocodile Farm is the Ancient City, a "must" for anyone interested in Thai culture and architecture. Here are faithfully reproduced scaled-down constructions of Thailand's most famous temples, palaces and other buildings, complete in all their decorative detail. Several are reconstructions of long-vanished architectural treasures.

In Bangkok's northern suburbs, on Raminthra Road, Safari World will delight the whole family. You can drive through a wildlife park and see lions, tigers and other animals roaming free. There is also a bird park and an exciting playland. Also in the northern suburbs is Siam Water Park, an aquatic playground which the children will love, especially on hot days.

Different styles of beach resorts are within easy reach of Bangkok. A two-hour drive southeast is Pattaya, on the Gulf of Thailand. A wide spectrum of watersports is combined with a variety of on-shore entertainment, night or day.

Further along the east coast, Rayong and the islands of Ko Samet and Ko Chang are more tranquil beach hideaways. The same is true of Hua Hin and neighbouring Cha-am, on the western shores of the Gulf. Hua Hin is Thailand's oldest resort, first coming to prominence in the 1920s.

Bridge over the River Kwai

This bridge was built by Allied prisoners-of-war under Japanese control. An estimated 16,000 prisoners-of-war and 49,000 labourers died during the construction of the bridge and the Death Railway line which leads into Myanmar.

War Cemetery

The cemetery contains the remains of 6,982 prisoners-of-war who lost their lives during captivity under the Japanese army in World War II.

JEATH War Museum

JEATH stands for Japan, England, America, Australia, Thailand, and Holland. The museum is a reconstruction of the detention hut for POWs in the Second World War on the walls are enlarged photos and illustrations of the atrocities perpetrated against the prisoners, and of their severe living conditions.

Erawan National Park

The Seven-tiered Erawan Falls are one of Thailand's most beautiful cascades. Dense bamboo groves and a lush natural mountainside setting support numerous bird species.

8.12.2 The Eastern Seaboard

Thailand's eastern sea coast, from Chonburi all the way to Trat, is endowed the area with waterfalls and mountains, beaches and islands. The region is also rich in archaeological and historical sites.

Chonburi

Less than one hundred kilometres from Bangkok, Chonburi is not only a well-known seaside destination, but also a major agricultural and industrial producer, with extensive sugarcane, tapioca and coconut plantations, and shallow and deep water fishery, as well as manufacturing plants.

Khao Khieo Open Zoo is about 11 kilometres from the Bangphra market. It covers an area of 2,000 acres, with more than 100 species of wildlife roaming freely. Tourists can walk and take a close look of monkeys, gibbons, elephants, deer, birds etc. The Zoo is open every day.

A waterfall, Namtok Chan Ta Then is 15 km. off Sukhumvit Road at Km.110 in the same direction as Khao Khieo Open Zoo. It is in the wild life Conversation area and is very beautiful shortly after the rainy season.

Siracha Farm located some eight kilometres from Siracha town. It is a mini-zoo with crocodiles, camels, tigers and many birds. Tourists can feed a camel or take photograph with a tiger. The farm is open everyday from 9.00-18.00 hrs.

The Chonburi Buffalo Races are held every October. The water buffalo is one of the mainstays in the life of a Thai farmer, but in this annual event put to more amusing uses than ploughing the local fields. There are buffalo races, contests pitting buffalo and man and beauty contests during this festival.

Pattaya

Located 147 kilometres south-east of Bangkok, about a two-hour drive, Pattaya is one of Thailand's premier beach resorts. It annually attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists from all over the world. In recent years Pattaya has earned an unsavoury reputation, partly for environmental degradation, and for its popularity with "sex tourists". Nevertheless, it remains a durable attraction with an unparalleled range of facilities, for young and old alike, day or night.

Facing a wide bay and a long beach, Pattaya has been groomed over more than three decades for international visitors. Today it boasts the unique distinction of a beach resort with city status. While other beach resorts rely simply on natural surroundings for their charm, Pattaya makes an all-out attempt to provide an exhaustive mix of facilities.

While there is plenty to keep the children happily occupied, there is also everything for the sports enthusiast, for couples of all ages seeking relaxation, and for those looking for good times in the sun.

Pattaya Beach is about four kilometres long. The beach road runs parallel to the beach from the north to the south. The northern part is more quiet while the southern part is hustle and bustling. On both sides of the southern street are shops of all kind, department stores, restaurants, discotheques, bars and night-clubs.

The island Ko Lan is 45 minutes offshore by tourist boat or 15 minutes by speedboat. Attractions include viewing coral reefs from glass-bottomed boats, snorkelling, scuba diving, windsurfing, water skiing and para-sailing. There are many seafood restaurants on the island's main beaches. Deep sea fishing can be arranged to Ko Lan's neighbouring islands.

A 40 minute sail from Ko Lan is Ko Phai, an island currently supervised by the Royal Navy. Visitors are not allowed to stay overnight, but it has fine deserted beaches that are open during the day.

All the nearby islands are easy to get to visit. Charters can be arranged through the hotel tour desk or by negotiating a price direct with the boat owners.

Pattaya Festival. This annual event is held in April at the height of the summer. Food and flora floats, beauty contests, stalls selling local delicacies, and a display of fireworks on the beach are a few of the highlights.

Rayong

The province of Rayong is known for its fine beaches, tasty food and delectable durian. It is 220 kilometres from Bangkok.

The King Taksin Shrine at Wat Lum Mahachai Chumphon commemorates the occasion when he was rallying Thai fighters to liberate the country from Burmese occupation, and draw large crowds during for the Chinese New Year celebrations.

The Sopha Botanical Gardens have one of the largest varieties of trees and plants in Thailand. It contains a group of three classical Thai houses, each of which is more than a 100 years old. The houses are completely furnished including, utensils traditionally used by the Thai people. There are also antique objects and art objects on display in the houses.

Sunthon Phu Memorial Park. The village of Ban Khram, on the coast road between Ban Phe and Klaeng, is the birthplace of Sunthon Phu (1786-1855), Thailand's greatest poet. There is beautifully kept memorial park where his house was. A statue Sunthon Phu is on a hill overlooking an ornamental pond. Below him are statues of characters from his most famous work. His beloved hero Phra plays a flute at the foot of the hill, a beautiful mermaid rests on a rock in the pond, and a giant ogress rises out of the water.

The island of Ko Samet, where Sunthon Phu based his most famous work, the story of Phra Aphaimani, is 6.5 kilometres off the coast of Ban Phe.

Samet Island offers beautiful beaches. The climate is always cool with abundant rains in August and windy monsoons in May. Accommodation at Ban Phe and on Samet Island is available. From Ban Phe, boats leave regularly for Ko Samet.

Rayong Fruit Fair. This fair is held in May or June at Amphoe Muang and Amphoe Klaeng. Rayong is famous for its lush fruit orchards, which produce some of the country's best grapefruit, jackfruit, rambutan, and durian. All are on sale at this fair, along with the shrimp paste and fish sauce for which the province is noted and a variety of local handicrafts.

Chantaburi

Chanthaburi is another eastern province with an important role in the history of the nation both before and during the Rattanakosin Period. It is wealthy and rich in natural resources, particularly gems in addition to the plentiful field of tropical fruits including rambutan, durian and mangosteen. Products from the seas are also extensive. Chanthaburi is 290 kilometres from Bangkok.

Stored at the Underwater Archaeological Museum are antiques taken from the ancient junks lying in the seabed of the Gulf of Thailand. Most of the objects are earthenware and Sangaloke china. The office is in Khai Noen Wong, a military camp built during the reign of King Rama III as a barrier against invaders from Vietnam.

Some traces of the wall and bulwark are still left at the campsite, which is on the route to Ban Tha Chalap, eight kilometres west of the town.

Laem Sing Cape, a likeness of a lion facing the sea, is 31 kilometres from Chanthaburi town, on the Laem Sing hill are the remains of one of the two forts built during King Rama III's reign. Laem Sing beach serves as the leading pier for fishing boats.

Namtok Krathing. This is one of the most beautiful waterfalls in Khao Khitchakut National Park. It is 30 km. from Chanthaburi. Located on top of Khao Khitchakut is an imprint of Lord Buddha's foot, and the beautiful *Tham Ruesi* Hermit's Cave. In this cave is a water well called *Bo Ya* or Medicine Well. The soil in the well is yellow. Some people believe the water can cure diseases. Getting to the cave takes about two hours along a hiking trail. Tourists can stay in the national park.

Namtok Phliu. This waterfall boasts a stupa that was built by King Rama V in 1876, as well as a pyramid-type structure housing the remains of Queen Sunantha. Accommodation is available.

Chonburi Fruit Fair. This annual fair is held in May or June to celebrate local fruits as rambutan, durian, jackfruit and pomelo, then at their peak ripeness. Besides stalls selling the produce of surrounding orchards, there are cultural shows and exhibitions of handicrafts.

Trat

Trat is Thailand's eastern most province, 400 kilometres from Bangkok. The Khao Banthat mountain range is the natural boundary with Cambodia. There are many islands with natural scenery.

Mu Ko Chang National Park consists of 52 isles. Koh Chang is the most important and biggest island. It is peaceful and tranquil. Magnificent beaches are on the island's western coast. A large waterfall, Than Mayom, is 500 metres from the national park office. Ko Chang (elephant island) is the third biggest in the country after Phuket and Ko Samui. It is popular for its relatively undeveloped nature, and the cheap bungalow accommodation available on its long stretches of beaches.

Other interesting islands are Ko Chang Noi, Ko Mai Si Yai, Ko Rang, Ko Ngam, and Ko Khum. There is accommodation on Ko Ngam.

Ko Lao Ya is an island off Ao Salak Phet bay. It has a white sand beach, clean and clear water and beautiful coral and fish. There are bungalows on Ko Lao Ya. Ko Wai. This island has tranquil beaches, tropical flora and fantastic corals. It is one of the most beautiful islands in the Ko Chang Group. Bungalows are available. Ko Mak, an island with a village, is 4 hrs. by boat from Laem Ngop. Ko Kradat is small island two hours by boat from Laem Ngop. It is blessed with beautiful scenery and is ideal for relaxation and swimming. Ko Kut is a large island four hours by boat from Laem Ngop or Amphoe Khlong Yai. It is mountainous and offers scenic views of coconut groves, rubber plantations, beaches, and the Khlong Chao or Than Sanuk Waterfall which King Rama VI visited in 1911.

How to get to Laem Ngop and Ko Chang. From Bangkok, take the five-hour trip from the Eastern Bus Terminal to Trat. Continue by a minibus to Laem Ngop 17 kilometres from Trat. From the pier at Laem Ngop, a daily boat service goes to Ko Chang.

8.12.3 The Northeast

The Northeast or Esan includes 19 provinces and covers an area of more than 170,000 sq. km, or one-third of the entire country. It borders Laos and Cambodia to the east.

Esan is easily accessible by car, train or air. Four major highways connect it with other regions. Air-conditioned and non-air-conditioned buses leave the New Northeastern Bus Terminal at regular intervals. The Northeast provinces that can be reached by train are Nakhon Ratchasima, Buri Ram, Surin, Si Saket, Khon Kaen, Udon Thani, Nong Khai, and Ubon Ratchathani. The provinces that can be reached by direct Thai Airways flights include Nakhon Ratchasima, Sakon Nakhon, Khon Kaen, Udon Thani, Ubon Ratchathani, Buri Ram, and Nakhon Phanom.

Buri Ram

Buri Ram, known as the City of Pleasantness, is one of the largest and the most populated provinces in Esan. About 410 kilometres from Bangkok, its leading attractions, include the Prasat Hin Phanom Rung and the huge Buddha image atop Mount Khao Kradong.

Buri Ram Traditional Boat Races. This annual regatta is staged on the Mun River in Amphoe Satuk during the first weekend of November. Celebrations include processions and cultural performances and an elephant swimming race.

Chaiyaphum

Pa Hin Ngam National Park is a forested area in Amphoe Thep Sathit situated 140 kilometres from Chaiyaphum. Huge rocks of curious shapes are scattered throughout. In the early rainy

season, from May to July, Pa Hin Ngam is carpeted with pink flowers growing wild. In the cool season, December to January, yellow orchids grow in the rock crevices and wild flowers bloom throughout the forest. Camping sites and accommodation are available.

Ban Khai and Chaiyaphum Elephant Roundup. Located 12 kilometres from the provincial city, Ban Khai or Ban Khai Mun Phao is Chaiyaphum's elephant village. The main occupation of the villagers is the taming of captured wild elephants. The elephant roundup, an annual event, takes place in January.

Kalasin

Despite its small size, Kalasin is a busy agricultural province with many attractions. Kalasin is 519 kilometres from Bangkok.

Phrae Wa Silk, a renowned product of Kalasin, is hand-woven in unique colourful designs by the Phu Thai people of Ban Phon Village, Amphoe Kham Muang. The Phu Thai are descendants of Vietnamese immigrants. Phrae Wa silk is available at Kalasin Cultural Centre and souvenir shops in the province.

Khon Kaen

As the development centre for the Northeast, Khon Kaen is the *de facto* capital of Esan, and the site of many important establishments, including Khon Kaen University. The Ubolrat Dam is one of the national infrastructure projects in this area. Khon Kaen is 449 kilometres from Bangkok.

Phu Kao-Phu Phan Kham National Park, about 55 kilometres from the provincial centre was established as a national park on December 20, 1985. Most of the area is covered with forest with mixed deciduous forest and evergreen forest in some parts.

8.12.4 The south

The southern provinces of Thailand extend down a long peninsula (often referred to as the nose of an elephant from its distinctive geographical shape). The peninsula is bordered by the Gulf of Thailand to the east, the Andaman Sea to the west, and Malaysia to the south.

The region is characterised by tropical islands, stunning palm-fringed beaches, picturesque fishing villages, remote national parks, coral reefs, mountains and rubber estates, all juxtaposed with temples and mosques.

One can consistently rely on fine weather and calm seas on the western side of the Thai peninsula from November to March, and on the eastern side from May to September. The southwest monsoon season, which lasts for six months from May to October, brings rains and squalls to the coastal areas of the Andaman Sea. Tourists wishing to take boat trips to outlying islands are advised to check the weather forecast before setting out.

Transportation to and throughout the southern region is fast and convenient by road, rail and air links.

Chumphon

The port city of Chumphon is considered the gateway to the south. It is located 463 km to the south of Bangkok. Along its 222-km coastline there are many beautiful beaches and bays, as well as islands for excellent fishing and diving.

Attractions include the Namtok Kapo Forest Park and Hat Sai Ri, a popular beach 15 km southeast of the town.

Surat Thani and Ko Samui

Surat Thani, which translates as the City of Good People, is generally known as a kick-off point by boat for the more famous island of Ko Samui.

Ko Samui is a 247 square km island to the 84 km to the east of Surat Thani. The island was “discovered” by travellers in the early 1970s, who were attracted by the idyllic charms of the coconut covered island. It has subsequently been developed to attract more well-heeled visitors, although one can still find areas of splendid isolation. The island is served by boats from Surat Thani, and by Bangkok Airways from Bangkok.

The island has many attractions, both natural and man-made, including top-rate diving, surfing, a butterfly park and monkey school, where the animals are taught to pick coconuts.

Phangnga

Phangnga is characterised by disused tin mines (not very attractive) and limestone formations jutting out of its crystal blue seas (wonderfully attractive). The area has become popular for sea kayaking, where visitors can explore numerous island formations.

Phuket

Phuket is Thailand’s largest island and premier tourist destination. The island traditionally made its money from tin and rubber, but nowadays tourist dollars are the largest source of income. The island is blessed with numerous beaches and coves, with a hilly interior.

Krabi

Krabi is one of the most attractive destinations in southern Thailand with clear waters, long beaches, inland waterfalls and caves, and the distinctive limestone formations rising perpendicularly out of the sea.

Nakhon Si Thammarat

Nakhon Si Thammarat is the south’s most historically important town. It once controlled various cities and towns. It houses Lord Buddha’s relics and was the centre of Buddhism during Sivichaya period. It is 870 km from Bangkok. It has high plateaus, mountains and jungles in the west sloping down into a basin along the coastline of the Gulf of Thailand.

Wat Phra Mahathat, originally an old monastery, is in the heart of the city. It is believed to have been constructed during Sivichaya period in accordance with the beliefs of Mahayana Buddhism. An extensive complex is centred on the 77-metre pagoda that houses Buddha relics brought from Sri Lanka some 1,700 years ago. There also are many other important archaeological places.

Laem Ta Lum Phuk is 40 km from the town. It is a long sandy cape jutting out into the Gulf of Thailand. A fishing village has settled on its western beach. Pine trees line the eastern beach and many different seashells can be found on the white clean sand.

Trang

Trang is 828 km from Bangkok. It is a fair size city and the communications centre to Nakhon Si Thammarat. In the old days, it was an important seaport on Thailand’s west coast.

Plian Seaside resort’s beautiful beaches are Hat Samran and Hat Ta Se. There are also several beautiful offshore islands such as Ko Sukon.

Mu Ko Phetra National Park covers areas of both Trang and Satun provinces. From Trang, boats can be rented and are available at Kantang Port or Pak Bara Pot in Satun. The peak tourist season starts in December and ends in April. Natural Park accommodation is provided

on Ko Lidi. Private accommodation is available on Ko Bulon. Kantang Seaside Resort is at a seaport on the coast along the Indian Ocean.

Phattalung

Phattalung, known in the south as the Town of the Hollow Hill is 840 km from Bangkok and 56 km from Trang. Entering Phattalung, one can see the hollow hill in the heart of the city. In Phattalung, the people created two famous forms of entertainment, the Monara and Shadow Play.

Before one arrives in downtown Phattalung, one can see hill. Its top is divided, with Tham Khuha Sawan cave on the left side. In the cave, Buddha images are enshrined along the wall. Kings Rama V and VII both visited the cave.

Khao Ok Thalu is a hollow hill 250 metres high to the east of the railway station. One can climb up to the top, where there is a hole to look through. It has become a symbol of Phattalung.

Songkhla

Songkhla is one of the most famous seaside resort towns of the south. Nearby Hat Yai town is the gateway for Malaysian and Singaporean tourist to enter Thailand. Songkhla has a large port and several lakes and beaches. Songkhla is 950 km south of Bangkok on the eastern side of the Malayan Peninsula.

The Songkhla National Museum on Chana Road dates from the 1870s. The complex was built in southern Thai Chinese style as the residence of local luminaries. The museum houses Thai art objects from prehistoric to modern times, and archaeological artefacts.

Khao Noi is located near Laem Samila on a small hill. One can hike to the top. At the foot of the hill lies the decorated landscaped Seri Park. Khao Tangkuan is west of Khao Noi and about 2,000 feet above sea level. On the top of the hill there is a pagoda constructed by King Mongkut in 1866.

Satun

Satun is one of the four southern provinces where 80 percent of Thailand's Islamic population lives. It is famous for its Ko Tarutao, pirates, and the beautiful Ko Adang-Rawi. Satun is 973 km from Bangkok on the west coast of the Malayan Peninsula facing the Indian Ocean.

Tatutao National Park is an archipelago in Tambon Ko Sarai, Amphoe Muang. It was the first marine national park in Thailand. It comprises 51 islands.

Ko Tarutao is the biggest island in the park. It used to be a prison for long-term offenders and political prisoners. It has many attractive beaches, including Ao Phante Malaka. There are waterfalls, caves, coral reefs with various kinds of sea fauna, and historical sites and ruins of prisons at Ao Talo Udang and Ao Talo Wao.

Pattani

Pattani was famous in former times for its woman ruler. The biggest cannon ever made in Thailand was cast in Pattani. The central mosque is the most beautiful in the south, being the centre of Thai Muslims. Pattani is 1,055 km from Bangkok on the coast of the South China Sea of the Pacific Ocean.

The Institute of Arts and Culture is at the Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani campus. In its museum are documents, artefacts and art objects of images of Buddha, votive tablets, coins, and local handicrafts.

The mouth of the Pattani River is three km from the town. In the area is a big fishery village with thousands of coconut trees lining the beach.

Yala

Yala is the southern-most province of Thailand. Its Betong town is the southern-most town in Thailand. The town features a gigantic Reclining Buddha of the Sivichaya period. Its main means of livelihood is rubber production.

Yala comprises mostly forest and mountain, with year-round rain. There are several rivers and canals, the most important being the Pattani River.

Banglang Dam in Ban Banglang, Tambon Ba Cho, Amphoe Bannang Sata, on the Yala-Betong route, 58 kilometres from Yala town, is famous for its beautiful scenery.

Another unique feature of Yala is the *Sakai* aboriginal community. They live in Tambon Ban Hae 80 km from Yala town. The *Sakai*, with dark skin, flat faces, flat nostrils and curly hair, still live a primitive life tending small vegetable patches and searching for herbal roots and trees in the jungle.

Narathiwat

Narathiwat is another deep southern province bordering on Malaysia. Amphoe Sungai Ko-Lok is an important junction where the Thai railroad joins the Malaysian rail system. Narathiwat has beautiful natural scenery with both forests and seaside resorts. It is 1,149 km. south of Bangkok.

Thaksin Ratchanivet Palace is on the eastern foot hill of Khao Tanyong, eight km from town.

8.12.5 The north

The north is the home of Thailand's earliest civilization and is famous for its attractive women and hospitable people, as well as many sites of archaeological and cultural interest. The largest dam in Thailand, and one of the top 10 biggest in the world, the Bhumibol Dam is located in Tak province. The northern region is home to many colourful hill tribe people, such as the Lahu, the Yao, the Akha, the Karen, the Hmong and the Lisu people.

The best way to appreciate the natural charms of the North is by joining a jungle adventure tour. One can travel on foot, by jeep, by elephant back, by river raft or mountain bike. Overnight stops are made at hill tribe villages, where one gains a rare insight into tribal life. Trips last from one day to one week. Groups are accompanied by experienced guides.

Those with less time can experience the jungle scenery by taking one-day tours that typically include a visit to an elephant farm, a hill tribe village and a river trip on a bamboo raft.

Northerners love festivals and have numerous celebrations unique to the region. Notable among these is the Chiang Mai Flower Festival in February. Traditional festivities, such as ordination ceremonies for young men entering the monkhood, tend to be far more elaborate in the North than in Bangkok.

Excursions from the capital of the North, Chiang Mai (Rose of the North) are recommended to Mae Hong Son and Chiang Rai. It is best to allow a couple of days for each. Mae Hong Son can be reached from Chiang Mai by air or by road. The road journey takes a full day in each direction. There are also air and road connections to Chiang Rai, though a more adventurous approach is by road to Tha Thon and then by boat down the Kok River, a full day trip.

The North is increasingly becoming a gateway to neighbouring Myanmar, Laos and Yunnan province in southern China. From new air links to river journeys up the Mekong River, new possibilities for touring are rapidly opening up.

Chiang Mai

Chiang Mai is a city with a beautiful cultural personality of its own. In addition, it has been blessed with much majestic beauty in nature. The people themselves are an unforgettable part of Chiang Mai. Handicrafts of silk, silver and wood are souvenirs for visitors from all over the globe. Along with all this, a wide variety of accommodation, restaurants, and entertainment all help to make Chiang Mai one of Thailand's prime tourist attractions..

Chiang Mai, 761 kilometres by rail, approximately 700 km. by road north of Bangkok, has an area of 20,107.1 sq.m. It is Thailand's second largest

A large part (69.31 percent) of Chiang Mai's land is covered by mountains and forests. These generally run in a north-south pattern through the province and give birth to several streams and tributaries (such as the Mae Jam, Mae Ngud, and Mae Klang) which in turn feed important rivers and irrigation canals (such as the Muang and Faay) which provide the water necessary to Chiang Mai's agriculture. Chiang Mai's largest and most important river is the Ping, which originates in the mountains of Chiang Dao and flows southward for 540 kilometres.

Chiang Mai is also home to *Inthanon Mountain*, which stands 2,575 meters above sea level and is Thailand's highest mountain.

The majority (80 percent) of Chiang Mai people earn a living through agriculture and agricultural related professions. The second largest vocation is tourism and its directly and indirectly related jobs.

Chiang Mai is often spoken of by tourists and visitors as being a city with a distinct beauty and cultural heritage of its own. Along with its numerous ancient temples and buildings, nature added her own handiwork in the majestic mountains. Almost countless numbers of waterfalls, caves, mountain peaks, and national parks can be found in the areas surrounding Chiang Mai city.

The large majority of these tourist destinations are under the authority of governmental agencies like the National Park Department, the Agricultural Ministry Co-op., and the Royal Forestry Department. While at some places a very small fee for maintenance of the park may be requested, there is usually no admission cost. For those thinking of spending the night, most of the parks have limited accommodations, if any at all, and permission must be obtain in advance for the use of these facilities.

At present, however, privately owned accommodation is available near some of the parks.

Chiang Mai is a blend of Cambodian, Burmese, and Indian cultures. The result is the distinct Lanna culture and architecture that is still evident in Chiang Mai today.

Wat Jedi Luang ancient temples can be seen almost anywhere in the city, with *Wat Chiang Mun* being the oldest. Near the top of *Suthep Mountain* is the famous *Wat Prathat Doi Suthep Temple*. Other temples of interest include *Wat Chedi Luang*, which houses the city pillar that traditionally marks the centre of a town.

There are other types of natural attractions such as commercial orchid farms, butterfly farms, snake farms, and elephant camps. These are found chiefly in the Mae Rim District. An

admission fee is required for entrance.

If you are looking for little excitement, consider an elephant ride through the jungle, available at the *Elephant Training Centre, Chiang Dao*. Another point of interest is rafting down the Kok River from Tha Ton to Chiang Rai. For a ride faster than the simple bamboo raft provides, you also have the option of the long-tailed speed boat. A veteran raft rider might also be interested in the Mae Tang and Pai Rivers.

Hilltribe villages provide the chance to observe diverse cultures and languages. Villages that are closer to and have greater contact with towns include the Hmong (Meo) on Pui Mountain, and the Mae Sa Mai Hmong on the Mae Rim-Samoeng Rd.

If you are interested in observing hilltribe villages whose traditions, customs, and vocations are still intact and also in getting the chance to experience the adventure of the jungle, you must travel further up into the mountains. There are several tour guide companies in Chiang Mai that provide trekking services. Most treks last for more than a day, and involve spending the night in a designated hilltribe village. Prices vary by facilities provided and destinations.

Chiang Mai-Sankampaeng Rd. is a good direction to take in order to get to know the beauty of Chiang Mai's handicrafts. Located along this road are the famed umbrella villages of *Bor Sang* and *San. Ton Pao*, also well-known for their *sa* paper, and the *Ton Pring* village, famous for its woodwork.

Chiang Rai

Chiang Rai province covers some 11,678 square kilometres with a population of 1.23 million at an average elevation of 580 metres above sea level, is bordered by Myanmar to the north, and Laos to the north and northeast. The provincial capital is 785 kilometres north of Bangkok.

Chiang Rai was founded in 1262 by King Meng Rai and was the first capital of Lanna Thai (Kingdom of a million ricefields). The province contains Thailand's northernmost point at *Mae Sai*, and is well known for its crisp mountain scenery, and hilltribes, and falls within the region known as the Golden Triangle, the area where the borders of Thailand, Myanmar and Laos converge.

Within the city, the *King Meng Rai the Great Monument* is located on the city outskirts, beside the northern road to Mae Chan, and honours the monarch who founded Chiang Rai in 1262. *Wat Phra That Doi Thong*, an ancient hilltop pagoda overlooking the Mae Kok River, predates the founding of Chiang Rai as the capital of Lanna Thai. *Wat Phra Kaeo* is located behind *Wat Phra Singha*, and is said to have been the original place of the Emerald Buddha, which is now enshrined in Bangkok's *Wat Phra Kaeo*.

The Mae Kok River, known in Thai as Maenam Kok, is a scenic 130-kilometre long waterway that runs through the heart of Chiang Rai. The river is a major transportation artery from neighbouring Chiang Mai province, especially the town of *Tha Ton* (180 kilometres north of Chiang Mai), from where tong-tailed boats make the three to four hour journey every day. The river passes several hilltribe settlements and elephant camps from where jungle treks originate.

The *Khun Kon Forest Park Waterfall* is located 30 kilometres south of Chiang Rai, along Routes 1211 and 1208. The 70 metre high *Khun Kon Waterfall* is the highest in the province. The *Amphow Mae Chan* hot spring is located eight kilometres from Mae Chan, along Route 1089. The complex has hot mineral water and bath-house facilities. Accommodation is available.

The Hilltribe Development and Welfare Centre is 15 kilometres along the route to Doi Mae Salong. The centre aids and administers local hilltribe settlements. Hilltribe handicrafts, including woven cloth and silverware, are on sale.

Doi Mae Salong is located some 40 kilometres from Mae Chan, along Route 1089, where a mountaintop settlement known as *Santi Khiri* is home to descendants of Chinese Nationalist soldiers who fled to, and settled in Thailand, in 1940. Mountainside plantations of coffee, and fruit orchards, provide scenic variety. The area is particularly picturesque in December and January when Thai cherry trees are in blossom. Accommodation, restaurant and opportunities for horse-riding and trekking number among major attractions

Mae Sai is a border town facing Myanmar across the Mae Sai River. It is located 62 kilometres north of Chiang Rai on Highway No. 110. Numerous shopping opportunities exist for popular Thai, Burmese and Chinese goods.

The Tham Pum-Tham Pla (reed and fish caverns) are known for their spectacular interiors.

Chiang Saen is a riverside town facing the Mekong River, 30 kilometres from Mae Chan via Highway No. 1016. It predates Chiang Rai and is famous for a special style of Buddha image. *The Chiang Saen National Museum* exhibits local art objects.

Boats can be hired from Chiang Saen to travel upstream to the Golden Triangle, and downstream to Chiang Khong. The trip to the Golden Triangle takes some 30 minutes, the trip to Chiang Khong about one hour and 30 minutes depending on river currents and water levels. Chiang Khong faces Laos across the Mekong River. Local tour operators can arrange for tourists to visit Laos.

Baan Haad Klai marks the Chiang Khong area where the freshwater *plabuek* catfish, which can attain lengths of 2.5 metres and weights of 300 kilogrammes, are caught between April 18 and early June each year. Baan Haad Bai 25 kilometres along the Chiang Saen-Chiang Khong road, is a Hai Lue community best known for its hand woven cotton.

Mae Hong Son

This is a beautiful town in Thailand's second northernmost province, sheltered by several high mountains. It enjoys a cool climate almost all year round. Mae Hong Son province is bordered by Myanmar to the north and the west, and a strong Burmese influence can be seen in the province's temples and buildings. The population of Mae Hong Son includes Thai Yai (or Shan) and various hilltribes such as Karen, Hmong, Lahu, Lua and Lisu districts. Mae Hong Son covers an area of

The city has numerous Burmese-style temples, including the hilltop *Wat Phra That Doi Kong Mu* which dominates the provincial city. Constructed by the first King of Mae Hong Son, the temple affords a wonderful view of the city and surrounding mountains and valleys.

About 12 kilometres outside Mae Hong Son, the *Pha Bong Dam* has been constructed across the Mae Ra Mat River for generating electrical power. Nearby is the *Pha Bong Hot Spring*.

Ban Nam Phiang Din is a destination in Tambon Pha Bong, a two-hour long motor boat trip or one day's rafting along the Pai River via Ban Huai Dua, a scenic route with marvellous terraced cataracts.

A wild sunflower field, *Doi Mae U-Kho* covers a large mountainous area in Tambon Mae U-Kho. The sunflowers, called *Bua Tong in Thai*, are in full bloom during November, which make the hills and surrounding areas look like they are plated with gold.

With a length of approximately 180 kilometres, the *Pai River* is the biggest and longest in Mae Hong Son, and it provides excellent rafting opportunities.

Lampang

Lampang city is about 100 kilometres south of Chiang Mai. It has a rich heritage, with many important monasteries.

The Kiu Lom Dam and reservoir located about 38 kilometres from the town. The famous *Thai Elephant Conservation Centre* lies in the Tung Kwian forest of Amphoe Hang Chat, about 38 kilometres from Lampang. It was the first school in Thailand for training elephants, and it provides daily shows.

Lampang is famous for its cottage industries, such as wood carving, ceramics and *sa* paper. A Carver's Village of *Ban Luk, Tambon Na Khrua, Amphoe Mae Tha*, about 25 kilometres from the district town. It is popular for carved animal figures, which are for sale. Lampang has the finest kaolin deposits in Thailand, so a ceramic industry flourishes. Ceramic factories line both sides of the road leading into the town and products are sold in downtown shops. *Sa* paper is made from paper mulberry, a species of soft wood with tough fibres that can be transformed into paper. *Sa* paper is a versatile material used in making many products, such as umbrellas, lamps, artificial flowers and various souvenirs.

8.13: Key contacts and festivals

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)

The TAT was established on March 18, 1960, the first organisation in Thailand to be responsible specifically for the promotion of tourism.

The TAT supplies information and data on tourist areas to the public, publicises Thailand so as to encourage Thai and international tourists to travel in Thailand, conducts studies to set development plans for tourist areas, and co-operates with and supports the production and development of personnel in the field of tourism.

Since the inception of the first local office of TAT in Chiang Mai in 1968, there are now 22 local offices throughout Thailand. The TAT has also established many overseas offices, the first being the New York office, in 1965. The TAT has since established 16 more offices in different parts of the world over the past 30 years.

The TAT can be contacted at:

Head Office:

Le Concorde Office Building
202 Ratchadphisek Road, Huai Khwang
Bangkok
Tel: (662) 694-1222
Fax: (662) 694-1220-1
E-Mail: center@tat.or.th
Home Page: www.tat.or.th

In Bangkok you'll find TAT Information counters at the following locations:

- Arrival Hall Don Muang Airport, Terminal 1. Tel: (662) 5238972-3, open daily 08.00-24.00
- Arrival Hall Don Muang Airport, Terminal 2. Tel: (662) 5352669, open daily 08.00-24.00
- 4 Ratchadamnoen Nok Avenue, Bangkok 10100 Tel: (662) 2829773-6, open daily 08.30-16.30
- 10th floor, Le Concorde Building, 202 Ratchadapisek Road, Huai Khwang, Bangkok, 10310. Tel: (662) 6941222 ext. 1000-1004. Open Monday-Friday : 08.30-16.30
- Chatuchak Weekend Market, Phahonyothin Rd., Bangkok, open Saturday-Sunday 09.00 - 17.00

Tourist Service Centre

The one-stop, 24-hour Tourist Service Centre assists tourists with any complaint and emergency, and provides general tourist information. It is located at 4 Ratchadamnoen Nok Avenue with the toll-free 1155 hotline service.

Regional offices

Kuala Lumpur

Suite 2201, Level 22, Menara Lion, 165
Jalan Ampang, 50450 Kuala Lumpur,
Malaysia
Tel: (007 60 3) 262-3480 Fax: (007 60 3)
262-3486
E-mail: sawatdi@pojaring.my

Singapore

c/o Royal Thai Embassy 370 Orchard Rd.,
Singapore 238870
Tel: (65) 235-7694, 235-7901, 735-0637
Fax: (65)733-5653
E-mail: tatsin@mbox5.singnet

Hong Kong

401 Fairmont House, 8 Cotton Tree Drive,
Central
Tel: (852) 2868-0732, 2868-0854 Fax:
(852) 2868-4585
E-mail: tathk@super.net
Areas of responsibility: Hong Kong,
Macau and the People's Republic of China

Taipei

13th Floor, Boss Tower, No. 111 Sung
Chiang Rd., (Near Nanking East Road
junction), Taipei 104
Tel: (886 2) 2502-1600 Fax: (886 2) 2502-
1603
E-mail: tattpe@ms3.hinet.net

Seoul

Coryo Daeyungak Center Bldg., Rm. No.
604, 6th Fl., 25-5, 1-Ka,
Chungmu-Ro, Chung-Ku, Seoul 100-706,
Korea
Tel: (82 2) 779-5417, 779-5418 Fax: (82
2) 779-5419
E-mail: tatsel@soback.kornet.nm.kr

Tokyo

Yurakucho Denki Bldg., South Tower,
2F., Room No.259, 1-7-1
Yurakucho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100,
Japan
Tel: (813) 3218-0337, 3218-0355 Fax: (81
3) 3218-0655
E-mail: tattky@crisscross.com

Osaka

Technoble Yotsubachi Bldg., 3F., 1-6-8
Kitahorie Nishi-ku, Osaka 550-0014,
Japan
Tel: (81 6) 6543-6654, 6543-6655 Fax:
(81 6)6543-6660
E-mail: tatos@ca.mbn.or.jp

Fukuoka

El Gala Bldg., 6F., 1-4-2, Tenjin, Chuo-ku
Fukuoka 810-0001, Japan
Tel: (8192) 725-8808 Fax: (8192) 735-
4434

Sydney

2nd Floor, 75 Pitt Street Sydney 2000
Australia
Tel: (61-2) 9247-7540 9247-7549
Fax: (61-2) 9251-2465
E-mail: info@thailand.net.au

Frankfurt

Thailandisches Fremdenverkehrsamt
Bethmannstr. 58 D-60311 Frankfurt/M.,
Germany
Tel: (49 69) 138-1390 Fax: (49 69) 281-468

London

49 Albemarle Street, London W1X 3FE,
England
Tel: (44 171) 499-7679 Fax:(44 171) 629-5519
E-mail: info@tat-uk.demon.co.uk

Paris

Office National du Tourisme de
Thailandais
90 Avenue des Champs Elysees, 75008
Paris, France
Tel: (33 1) 5353-4710 Fax: (33 1) 4563-7888
Tatpar@wanadoo.fr

Rome

Ente Nazionale per il Turismo Thailandese
Via Barberini 68, 4th Fl., 00187 Roma,
Italy
Tel: (39 6)487-3479, 481-8927 Fax:(3906) 487-3500
E-mail: tat.rome@iol.it

Los Angeles

611 North Larchmont Boulevard, 1st
Floor, Los Angeles, CA90004
Tel: (1 323) 461-9814 Free hotline 1-800-
Thailand (for U.S.A. and Canada)
Fax: (1 323) 461-9834
Tatla@ix.netcom.com

New York

1 World Trade Centre, Suite No. 3729
New York, N.Y. 10048, U.S.A.
Tel.: (1 212) 432-0433, 432-0435
Free hotline 1-800-Thailand (for U.S.A.
and Canada)
Fax: (1 212) 912-0920

Regional TAT offices

North

TAT Northern Office: Region 1
105/1 Chiang Mai-Lamphun Rd., Amphoe
Muang, Chiang Mai 50000
Tel: (66 53) 248-604, 248-607 Fax: (66
53) 248-605

Areas of responsibility: Chiang Mai,
Lamphun, Lampang and Mae Hong Son
E-mail: tatenx@samart.co.th

TAT Northern Office: Region 2
448/16 Singhakhilai Rd., Amphoe Muang,
Chiang Rai 57000

Tel: (66 53) 717-433, 744-674-5 Fax: (66
53) 717-434

Areas of responsibility: Chiang Rai,
Phayao, Phrae and Nan
E-mail: tatcei@loxinfo.co.th

TAT Northern Office: Region 3

209/7-8 Surasi Trade Centre,
Boromtrailokanat Rd., Amphoe Muang,
Phitsanulok 65000

Tel: (66 55) 252-743, 259-907 Fax: (66
55) 252-742

Areas of responsibility: Phitsanulok,
Phetchabun, Sukhothai, Uttaradit
E-mail:tatphs@loxinfo.co.th

TAT Northern Office: Region 4

193 Taksin Rd., Tambon Nong Luang,
Amphoe Muang, Tak 63000

Tel: (66 55) 514-341-3 Fax: (66 55) 514-344

Areas of responsibility: Tak, Phichit and
Kamphaeng Phet
E-mail: tks@loxinfo.co.th

Central

TAT Central Region Office: Region 1

Saeng Chuto Rd., Amphoe Muang,
Kanchanaburi 71000

Tel: (66 34) 511-200, 512-500 Fax: (66
34) 511-200

Areas of responsibility: Kanchanaburi,
Nakhon Pathom, Samut Sakhon and
Samut Songkhram

TAT Central Region Office: Region 2

500/51 Phetkasem Rd., Amphoe Cha-am,
Phetchaburi 76120

Tel: (66 32) 471-005-6 Fax: (66 32) 471-502

Areas of responsibility: Phetchaburi (Cha-
am), Ratchaburi and Phrachuap Khiri
Khan

E-mail: tourism@np.a-net.net.th

TAT Central Region Office: Region 3
609 Moo 10, Phratumak Rd., Pattaya City,
Bang Lamung District, Chon Buri 20260
Tel: (66 38) 427-667,428-750 Fax: (66 38)
429-113
Areas of responsibility: Pattaya

TAT Central Region Office: Region 4
153/4 Sukhumvit Rd. , Amphoe Muang,
Rayong 21000
Tel: (66 38) 655-420-1, 644-585 Fax: (66
38)655-422
Areas of responsibility : Rayong and
Chanthaburi
E-mail: tatry@infonews.co.th

TAT Central Region Office: Region 5
100 Mu 1 Trat-Laem Ngop Rd., Tambon
Laem Ngop, Amphoe Laem Ngop, Trat
23120
Tel: (66 39) 597-255, 597-259-60 Fax: (66
39)597-255
Areas of responsibility: Trat and its islands

TAT Central Region Office: Region 6
108/22 Mu 4, Tambon Pratuchai, Amphoe
Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya ,
Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya 13000
Tel: (66 35) 246-076-7 Fax: (66 35) 246-
078
Areas of responsibility: Phra Nakhon Si
Ayutthaya, Saraburi, Ang Thong, Suphan
Buri, Pathum Thani and Nonthaburi

TAT Central Region Office: Region 7
Rop Wat Phrathat Rd., Amphoe Muang,
Lop Buri 15000
Tel: (66 36) 422-768-9 Fax: (66 36) 424-
089
Areas of responsibility: Lop Buri, Nakhon
Sawan, Uthai Thani, Chai Nat and Sing
Buri

TAT Central Region Office: Region 8
182/88 Suwannason Rd. Amphoe Muang,
Nakhon Nayok 26000
Tel: (66 37) 312-282, 312-284 Fax: (66-
37) 312-286
Areas of responsibility: Nakhon Nayok, Sa
Kaeo, Prachin Buri and Chachoengsao

Northeast

TAT Northeastern Office: Region 1
2102-2104 Mittraphap Rd., Tambon Nai
Muang, Amphoe Muang,

Nakhon Ratchasima 30000
Tel: (66 44) 213-666, 213-030 Fax: (66
44) 213-667
Areas of responsibility: Nakhon
Ratchasima, Buri Ram and Chaiyaphum

TAT Northeastern Office: Region 2
264/1 Khaun Thani Rd., Amphoe Muang,
Ubun Ratchathani 34000
Tel: (66 45) 243-770 Fax: (6645) 243-771
Areas of responsibility: Ubun Ratchathani,
Amnat Charoen, Si Sa Ket and Yasothon

TAT Northeastern Office: Region 3
15/5 Prachasamosorn Rd., Amphoe
Muang, Khon Kaen 40000
Tel: (66 43) 244-498-9 Fax: (66 43) 244-
497
Areas of responsibility: Khon Kaen, Roi
Et, Maha Sarakham and Kalasin

TAT Northeastern Office: Region 4
184/1 Soontornvijit Rd., Tambon Nai
Muang, Amphoe Muang,
Nakhon Phanom 48000
Tel: (66 42) 513-490-1 Fax: (66 42) 513-
492
Areas of responsibility: Nakhon Phanom,
Sakon Nakhon and Mukdahan

TAT Northeastern Office: Region 5
16/5 Mukmontri Rd., Amphoe Muang,
Udon Thani 41000
Tel: (66 42) 325-406-7 Fax: (66 42) 325-
408
Areas of responsibility: Udon Thani, Nong
Bua Lamphu, Nong Khai and Loei

South

TAT Southern Office: Region 1
1/1 Soi 2 Niphat Uthit 3 Rd., Hat Yai,
Songkhla 90110
Tel: (66 74) 231-055, 238-518, 243-747
Fax: (66 74) 245-986
Areas of responsibility: Songkhla (Hat
Yai) and Satun
E-mail: tathatyai@hatyai.inet.co.th

TAT Southern Office: Region 2
Sanam Na Muang, Ratchadamnoen Rd.,
Amphoe Muang,
Nakhon Si Thammarat 80000
Tel: (66 75) 346-515-6 Fax: (66 75) 346-
517

Areas of responsibility: Nakhon Si Thammarat, Trang and Phatthalung

TAT Southern Office: Region 3
102/3 Mu 2 Tambon Kaluwonuea,
Amphoe Muang,
Narathiwat 96000
Sungai Kolok Tourist Information Centre,
Asia 18 Rd., Amphoe Sungai Kolok,
Narathiwat 96120
Tel: (66 73) 516-144, 522-411, 522-413
Fax: (66 73) 522-412
E-mail: tatnara@cscoms.com
Areas of responsibility: Narathiwat, Yala
and Pattani

TAT Southern Office: Region 4
73-75 Phuket Rd., Amphoe Muang,
Phuket 83000
Tel: (66 76) 211-036, 217-138 Fax: (66 76)
213-582
E-mail: tathkt@phuket.ksc.co.th
Areas of responsibility: Phuket, Phangnga
and Krabi

TAT Southern Office: Region 5
5 Talat Mai Rd., Ban Don, Amphoe
Muang, Surat Thani 84000
Tel: (66 77) 288-818-9 Fax: (66 77) 282-
828
Areas of responsibility: Surat Thani,
Chumphon and Ranong
E-mail: tatsurat@samart.co.th

Useful addresses

Immigration Office, Soi Suanplu, Sathon
Tai Road, Bangkok 10120, Tel: 287-
3101/10

The Revenue Department, Soi Samsen 2,
Bangkok 10200, Tel: 282-9899

National Museum Division, Na Phrathat
Road, Tel: 226-1661

Tourist Police, Rachadamnoen Nok Rd.,
Tel: 1155

The Royal Forestry Department,
Phahonyothin Road, Bangkok. Tel: 579-
7223, 579-5734, 561-4292-4 ext. 724 or
725. Fax: (662) 579-2791.

Bangkok International Airport,
Phahonyothin Road, Tel: 535-1111

Bangkok Domestic Airport,
Phahonyothin Road, Tel: 535-2081/2

Thai Airways International Ltd., Lan
Luang Road, Bangkok, 10100 Tel: 280-
0070, 280-0080

Bangkok Railway Station, (Hua Lam
Pong) Rama IV Road, Bangkok 10500
Tel: 223-7010, 223-7020

Northeastern Bus Terminal,
Phahonyothin Road, Bangkok, 10900 Tel:
272-0299

Southern Bus Terminal, Mochit,
Bangkok. Tel: 936-2841-8

Eastern Bus Terminal, Sukhumvit Road
(Ekamai), Bangkok 10110 Tel: 391-2504,
391-9829, 391-4990, 391-4164

Telephone Number Inquiries, Tel: 13
(English)

Airport service

Visitors are advised to use only the
authorised transportation services at the
arrival hall at Don Muang Airport. Airport
buses run at regular intervals to various
parts of the city. They are well sign-posted
and a good service. The fee is a flat 70
baht per person.

For an express boat into the city, contact
representatives of Oriental Hotel, Shangri-
la Hotel, Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel,
Marriott Royal Garden Riverside Hotel, or
River Jet Co., Ltd. Tel: 585-4490-3, 913-
2180-9. Air-conditioned bus to Pattaya
leave at regular intervals.

River cruises

River cruises are a great way to enjoy the
beauty and grandeur of the Chao Praya
River. Aside from the commercial
transport crafts, a number of companies
offer luxury cruise packages, most of
which include dinner. Note the following:

Khanab Nam restaurant, Tel: 424-8453.
From Krung Thon to Rama IX bridge, 8
p.m. daily. 70 baht per person, food
ordered separately.

Riverside Hotel, Tel: 883-1588, from
Krung Thon to Rama IX bridges, daily at 8
p.m. 70 baht per person, food ordered
separately.

Wanfah Cruise, Tel: 662-7657-61. From
River City to the Krung Thon bridge, daily

at 7 p.m. 600 baht Thai food, 650 baht seafood.

River Sun Cruise, Tel: 234-2250. Daily from River City pier to Aythaya, at 8.30 a.m. 1,300 baht per person including buffet lunch.

Oriental Hotel, Tel: 236-0400-20 ext. 3133. Daily from the hotel to Ayutthaya, at 8 a.m. 1,600 baht including buffet lunch.

Shangri-La Hotel, Tel: 236-7777. From the hotel to the Rama VI bridge, daily at 7.30 p.m. 1,300 baht per person international food.

Horizon Cruise (Ayutthaya trip), Tel: 236-7777 ext 1204, 1205. From the Shangri-La Hotel to Ayutthaya, daily at 8 a.m. Price includes a buffet lunch.

Royal River Hotel, Tel: 433-0300-19. From the hotel to Ko Kret, every other Saturday, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. 1,600 baht including buffet lunch.

Health centres

Balavi Natural Health Centre
191/3 Soi Ranong 1, Rama VI Rd.,
Phyathai, Bangkok 10400
Tel: (662) 279-5658
E-mail: detajin@samart.co.th
Alternative health care, colon cleansing,
solar bath, yoga, meditation, hydrotherapy,
hypnosis and acupuncture.

Chao Phraya Abhaiphubet Natural Health
Centre
32/7 Moo 12 Prachin-anusorn Road,
Muang, Prachin Buri 25000
Tel: (66-37) 211-448, 214-942-3 ext. 2515
Physical check up, meditation, natural
cure.

International Healing Tao
274/1 Moo 7, Luang Nua, Doi Saket,
Chiang Mai 50220.
Tel: (66-53) 495-596-9
Fax: (66-53) 495-852
E-mail: taogarden@hotmail.com
Website: www.healing-tao.com

One week intensive Tao retreats winter and summer, also acts as a health resort all year round.

Festivals

One of the overwhelming attractive aspects of Thailand is the range and uniqueness of the festivals it celebrates throughout the year across the country. Below is a selection of some of these, including some of the major ones, as well as the more-localised regional ones. For precise dates, check with the local Tourism Authority of Thailand office.

Midnight Merit-Making. An unusual tradition of the North is the merit-making presenting food to monks and novices after midnight. This is held on the Wednesday coinciding with the full moon, and can be seen at Muang District of Chiang Rai. Many monks and novices emerge at midnight to accept alms, a practice not followed in other regions of the country.

The Muang Kamphaeng Kluay Khai Fair. This is held about September and lasts three to five days, celebrating a popular fruit widely grown in Kamphaeng Phet. The Kluay Khai bananas grown here are tastier and the fair features contests to select the best Kluay Khai. and Miss Kluay Khai procession parades around town. There are also contests on votive tablets, preparation of sweet-meats and other entertainment.

Giant Catfish-Catching Season. The annual season for the catching of the giant catfish of the Mekong River traditionally begins on April 15 along the Mekong at Chiang Khong District of Chiang Rai, and lasts until May 15. Offerings are given to the divine protectors of the huge fish to seek their permission to catch them.

Swing Ceremony of the Akha. The Akha tribesmen of the North regularly hold a ceremony of the swing some time in August at the open areas in front of their villages located on hill country. It is intended to please the women of the tribe.

The swing is placed directly facing the “spirit door” leading to the village so that the guardian spirits will be aware and bring happiness to the community.

Chiang Mai Songkran Festival. One of the most popular celebrations of the Songkran, the traditional Thai New Year, it is held during April 13-15 throughout the town of Chiang Mai. Highly revered Buddha statues are borne on colourful processions for the people to sprinkle lustral water on them.

The Natural and Decorative Flowers Fair, held in February at Muang District, Chiang Mai, features contests of miniature floral gardens. The floral float procession featuring a Miss Flower attracts thousands of local people and tourists.

The Le Tong Ku Fair is held annually at the Le Tong Ku village in Umphang District of Tak Province. Living in remote areas, groups of Karens firmly believe in the village holy men and hold elephant tusks as sacred talismans. On the full-moon day of the 12th Lunar month (coinciding with early November, a fire tribute is made to earn merits for late ancestors.

The Muser New Year is celebrated in Tak province according to the Musers calendar which usually is two or three weeks away from the traditional Chinese new year. The first day of the two-day celebrations find young Muser men frenetically dancing on the balcony of all houses in the village until the structures collapse, which is considered a blessing for the owners. The following day, both young male and female put on their traditional best dresses and proceed to dance or cavort at the village grounds.

The Lanna Boat Race celebrating the Black Elephant Tusks in Nan is held annually on the first Saturday after the end of the Buddhist Rain Retreat when the Tod Krathin season begins (around October). The boats are dug out of solid teak and slender in shape, using 30-58 rowers.

The Rocket Festival on the first day of the waning moon of the 8th month of the

Northern calendar (about May) is celebrated both in Phrae and Nan. The native rockets are similar to those found in the Northeast, originally used to pay homage to the Lord Buddha and gods. Today the festival is held primarily to entertain. Teams representing various temples parade their rockets to the arena and each rocket is fired to see which can go highest.

The Pak Thong Khao Tradition Pak Thong Khao (raising of the white flag) is an unusual tradition long held by the people of the Nakhonthai District in Phitsanulok. It is observed on the 15th day of the waxing moon of the 12th lunar month when the local people participate in the weaving of a large piece of white cloth and turn it into a flag, all within one day. They will then raise it on the hilltop in the belief that not doing so would provoke Naga, the serpent, to burn down the district town.

The Li Soh New Year is celebrated by the Li Soh people, large groups of whom live in Mae Hong Son, coinciding with the Chinese New Year. During the three days and nights of festivities, young men and women of the tribe dress in their traditional best adorned with silver trinkets and ornaments. Ritual homage is paid to the land, ancestors and gods of the jungle and mountains. The occasion finds all the Li Soh villages in the most festive and lively mood in the year.

Jong Para (castle building) is incorporated in the Poi Lern Sib Ed Kun Fair at the end of the Buddhist Rain Retreat held in all temples of the Thai Yai people in Mae Hong Son. The “castles” are attractively made and then placed in front of the house or at the nearest temple to where they live, purportedly as the place where the Lord Buddha will stay on Ok Pansa (end of the Rain Retreat) and as homage to their ancestors.

Loi Krathong Sawan Mae Hong Son has the most unusual Loi Krathong ceremony which is held yearly on the 15th day of the waxing moon of the 12th lunar month at Wat Phra That Doi Kongmu in Muang

District. Being situated on a high plateau with no handy rivers, the krathong, leaf cups, are floated aloft instead of on the water as practised in the Central Region.

Khan Toke Chang is an event to celebrate elephants. Khan Toke is a traditional dinner arranged to welcome guests. In this case, it is adapted to give thanks to the pachyderms by providing them with food, with a light and sound presentation on elephants. It is held at the Thai Elephant Conservation Centre in Lampang during February 6-7.

Horse-Drawn Carriage Day, on March 6 of every year is celebrated by the people of Lampang where such conveyance is still in service in spite of modern modes of transport. There are different contests including a horse race.

The Salung Luang Fair is held annually in Lampang during the traditional Thai New Year (April). The traditional Lanna parades led by flags and banners feature the Salung Luang (water bowl).

Viang Lakhon is one of the several former names of Lampang, and the Luang Viang Lakon Fair is the major event celebrating Lampang's history and customs and traditions held in early February. Processions of traditional significance including horse carriages are re-enacted, with folk plays and other games. In the evening, the Khao Lan Khan Toke is held and a light and sound show is presented at major sites in Lampang alternating at venues on a yearly basis.

Ordination Procession on Elephant Back The traditions of the Thai Puan tribesmen at Ban Hat Sio, Sri Satchanalai District of Sukhothai, call for the ordination of their sons or nephews as monks before the Songkran Festival. The monks-to-be are borne on elephants, put on dark glasses and dressed in silk, a subtle reminder that all these earthly possessions, however valuable, will be no more once they enter the monkhood the next morning.

Tak Baht Nam Phung Merit-Making. This is traditionally held by Mon

descendants at all Mon temples nationwide and at the Thai-Raman Association in Bangkok. The merit-making activities coincides with the full moon of the 10th lunar month, which is also the day of the Thai Sat Day (autumn). The special offering is the Nam Phung or pure honey. Merit-makers are required to put honey in 32 begging bowls as tradition demands (32 being the number of body organs of a normal human being).

The century-old **Ploughing Ceremony** involves two components – the blessing of plant seeds (rice in particular) and the symbolic ploughing of the fields to signify the beginning of the rice-planting season. Both are now combined and performed at the Phramane Ground (Sanam Luang) in Bangkok as a royal function normally attended by members of the Royal Family. A Phraya Raek Na (Lord of the Festival) is appointed by royal command to perform the Brahminic rites. Rice seeds scattered in the ceremonial ploughing are highly coveted by farmers and ordinary people who scramble to pick them up to mix with their own rice seeds and revered as luck charms.

The Nava Ratri Ceremony celebrates the gods at the Indian Temple on Silom Road in Bangkok annually in October. The gods are invited to manifest themselves through mediums and supernatural power is demonstrated by mean of piercing both cheeks with sharp instruments or having the back of the mediums hooked then paraded along Silom Road at night.

The Bridge on the River Kwai Week. The week-long fair is annually held from November 25 to December 5 in the province of Kanchanaburi to commemorate the death of thousands of allied prisoners-of-war during World War II while building the infamous bridge.

The Luang Poh Sothon Fair of Chachoengsao is held three times a year during the 14th day of the waxing moon – the 1st day of the waning moon in the 5th lunar month, the 12th day of the waxing moon, the 1st day of the waning moon of the 12th lunar month, and during the

Chinese New Year. There are both water-borne and land.

The Straw Birds Fair is annually held in February at the Bird Park of Chainat Province where three metre or taller bird-like figures made of straw in natural color are featured.

The annual **Phra Pathom Chedi Fair** takes place at the end of November and early December for nine days. The celebrations around the chedi in Nakhon Pathom feature many folk-plays and entertainment, and thousands of people converge on the shrine to pay tribute and make donation for charity.

The Dragon Procession. The annual celebrations of the Chao Poh Chao Mae Pak Nam Po are held during the Chinese New Year in the district of Pak Nam Po and feature the exciting dragon dances on an island in the Chao Phraya River and in the town.

The Mon Klang is a tradition of the Mon People living in Sam Koke District of Pathum Thani along the river. Regardless of social status, they all make merit at the end of the Buddhist Rain Retreat. Monks from various temples travel to a selected temple by boat to accept alms from the villagers

The **Wua Lan Cattle Race** is an annual event in Phetchaburi Province held from January until after the Songkran Festival in all localities.

The Ban Mee Fair in the Ban Mee District of Lopburi is usually held around February each year as a means to restore the traditions and customs of the Thai Puan people. It is also promotes gem cutting, mudmee silk weaving and the distinctive Pla Soi fish sauce of the locality. Traditional performances including firework displays, weaving demonstrations, a beauty contest and gem cutting contest are held.

Celebrations for **King Rama II** are held at the end of February every year at Rama II Park in Samut Songkram. Visitors can enjoy the art of making dishes and sweets

as portrayed in various literature works, as well as puppet shows and open-air dance performances.

During the Songkran period of mid-April, the **Phra Pradaeng Songkran Festival** is celebrated at the Phra Pradaeng District in Bangkok. Traditional activities are organised, birds and fish are released, and there are many games.

The Don Chedi Memorial Fair commemorates the historical victory of a Thai king over his Burmese opponent in a classic elephant-back combat. The fair is held at Don Chedi District of Suphan Buri in late January.

Tak Baht on the River. The people of the Bang Pla Ma District in Suphan Buri make food offerings to monks on the waterways, a tradition held every year on the 12th day of the waning moon of the 12th lunar month at Wat Pa Pruk. The heavy river traffic is quite a scene.

The **Shud Phra Baht Tradition** event is organised yearly during April 17-24 by the Tapon villagers in Klung District, Chanthaburi at Wat Tapon Yai. Natives of two hamlets engage in a tug-of-war to vie for a piece of holy cloth.

The **Pattaya Festival**, normally held in early April, features spectacular processions of floats decorated with fresh and ornamental. There are also exhibitions on underwater archaeology, art objects found in Pattaya Bay and nearby areas, sea shells, fishery, fishing, sailing and other marine sports.

Buffalo Races. These are held in Chonburi on the 14th day of the waxing moon of the 11th lunar month. Contesting water buffaloes are decked out with their horns covered with glove-like bags and led by colourful ropes.

Duan Hok, the 6th lunar month (May), is the time of the **Bun Bung Fai**, or the Rocket Festival in Yasathon to pay tribute to Guarding Spirit of the community and to ask for regular rain.

The Duan Sib Song-Boon Kathin is the occasion to present robes to monks and novices who have completed the Rain Retreat. The Northeastern people celebrate the Kathin from the first day of the waning moon of the 11th lunar month to the full-moon day of the 12th lunar month (around November). So do the people in the Central Plain.

On November 29-December 8 every year, Khon Kaen holds its annual **Silk Fair** in front of the town hall. The festival itself is an old Northeastern tradition. A special feature of the fair is the Miss Silk procession with beautiful floats decorated with silk products accompanied by dancing troupes.

Phi Fah Dance. The people of Chaiyaphum pay homage to the Ong Tue statue every year during April 13-15. During the celebrations, local traditional healers or mediums will perform dances called the Ram Phi Fah to seek blessings.

The **Phra That Phanom Fair**, from the 12th day of the waxing moon to the 1st day of the waning moon of the 3rd lunar month, is held annually at Wat Phra Thaat Phanom in the provincial town of Nakhon Phanom. The Phra That Phanom is an ancient religious site highly revered by people on both sides of the Mekong River.

The Buriram Boat Race at Satuk District of Buriram dates back more than 50 years.

The Isan Kite Fair. The province of Buriram holds the fair annually during the month of November at Huay Jorakeh Mak of Muang District in an effort to preserve traditions and revive kite contest.

Mukdaharn Inter-Tribal Meeting. The many tribal peoples of Mukdahan get together from January 9-15 at Muang District of the province every year. The prominent feature of the event is the

homage-paying ritual to the spirit of Thao Kinnaree, founder of Mukdahan.

The Cotton Blossom Fair, held annually on February 1-7 at the Kud Pong public park in Muang District of Loei to celebrate this economic crop.

Wax Castle Procession. The 14th day of the waxing moon of the 11th lunar month is the day of the Wax Castle Procession in Sakon Nakhon to present the candles to the Holy Relics at Wat Phra Thaat Cherngchum. The kilometers-long procession also includes performances of ancient Isan.

The Surin Elephant Show, on the third weekend of November every year at the provincial Sports Arena, one of the most well-known annual events of Thailand takes place. The shows demonstrate the intelligence of trained elephants. There are also cultural local performances.

Candle Procession. A traditional grand candle procession is organised by the people of Ubon Ratchathani on the full moon day of the 8th lunar month at Tung Sri Muang in mid-town Ubon. The main features are the gigantic candles made from soft wax.

The Phuket Vegetarian Fair, from the first to the ninth day of the waxing moon of the 9th lunar month has been observed ever since Chinese came to settle on the island. Strict abstinence and partaking of only vegetables are regarded as a cleansing process to rid illness. A special feature is the parade on the first of white-clothed devotees and several ascetic displays, including fire-walking and pushing iron rods through various parts of the body.

The Moon Festival in Songkhla is celebrated on the full-moon day of the 8th month of the Chinese calendar (early October). It is held to pay homage to the moon, regarded as the Queen of Heavens. The traditional processions are both beautiful and exciting, with parades of the dragons, lions and moonlanterns.

Loi Krathong is an impressive and fascinating festival observed in all parts of the country on the full-moon night of the 12th lunar month, when the moon is in its splendour and water in all rivers and streams runs full. It is intended primarily as an act of atonement to Mother River. Small receptacles made of banana leaves fashioned in the shape of lotus containing incense and candles, flowers and money, as well as pieces of cut nails and strands of hair, are floated as a gesture of expiation.

Songkran Festival celebrates the traditional Thai New Year, which falls in mid-April. It is the occasion for Thais to make merit and to sprinkle lustral water on their elders as a gesture of respect while seeking their blessings. Traditional folk plays and entertainment are held throughout the country.