

The Kingdom of Thailand



Situated in the heart of mainland Southeast Asia and approximately the size of France, the Kingdom of Thailand is a nation of approximately 66 million with an open, diverse society and a rich cultural heritage. Bangkok – the capital – is the country’s largest city with over 11 million inhabitants.

A parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy, Thailand today has a political system similar to that of the United Kingdom. The King is the Head of State who is above partisan politics and discharges his role in accordance with the country’s Constitution. The administration of the country is carried out by the Council of Ministers headed by the prime minister. The Kingdom has a bi-cameral legislature and an independent judiciary. In spite of periods of political turbulence over the last 78 years as a democracy, Thai society has shown unwaveringly commitment towards becoming a full-fledged, multi-party democracy.

As Southeast Asia’s second largest economy, with a gross domestic product (GDP) of around USD 300 billion, Thailand is a vibrant, free-market economy where the private sector serves as the main engine of growth. Though traditionally an agrarian society and long one of the world’s few net food exporters, the Kingdom has a strong industrial sector (40 per cent of GDP) and a robust and growing services sector (50 per cent of GDP) centred on the tourism and financial services industries. The agricultural sector

today accounts for approximately 9 per cent of the country’s GDP. Historically a nation with vibrant contacts with the outside world, with merchants from China, India, Persia and Europe being among the early foreign visitors, the Thai economy today is well integrated with the global market, with exports – ranging from agricultural and food products, textiles to automobiles and hi-tech goods, accounting for over 70 per cent of the country’s GDP. Thailand is also a favoured destination of direct foreign investment, as the World Bank has ranked it third in Asia and twelfth in the world in terms of ease of doing business.

While some 94 per cent of Thais are Buddhists of the Theravada tradition, the Kingdom is also home to people with diverse beliefs and faiths, including Muslims, Christians and Hindus. There are small Sikh and Jewish communities in the country as well. Thailand has a large community of expatriates from various countries, living and working in different parts of the country. It has also been chosen by many media firms, business operators, international organisations and non-governmental organisations as the base for their regional offices.

Natural beauty, mild tropical climate, culinary delights, unlimited possibilities for shopping, and renowned hospitality and services have made Thailand a favourite tourist destination. Over the years, the Kingdom and its cities have topped numerous travellers’ polls as being among the world’s most favoured tourist destinations including those conducted by prestigious traveller magazines such as Condé Nast and Travel + Leisure, with the latter recently ranking Bangkok and Chiang Mai as the first and second top cities in the world in its “2010 World’s Best Awards” survey. The Kingdom has also been ranked as the best value long-haul destination by the United Kingdom Post Office’s Holiday Costs Barometer Survey. Annually, Thailand welcomes more than 14 million foreign visitors annually, including over 840,000 from the United Kingdom.

