Advice on travelling to Thailand

The following has been obtained from the DFAT website. Please visit the website for the most up to date information prior to travel

- We advise you to exercise a high degree of caution in Thailand due to the threat of terrorist attack, particularly in the provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Songkhla, where we advise you not to travel.
- Pay close attention to your personal security at all times and monitor the media for information about possible new safety or security risks.
- Australians should be aware that there is a threat of terrorist attack in Thailand, including in Bangkok. We continue to receive reports that terrorists may be planning attacks against a range of targets, including locations frequented by tourists and foreigners. In January and February 2012, Thai authorities arrested several foreign nationals allegedly planning to launch attacks in Bangkok, including in tourist areas.
- Large scale political demonstrations and related incidents in Bangkok and other parts of Thailand have occurred in recent years. You should avoid protests and political rallies, and any security deployments associated with such events.
- Penalties for drug offences are severe and include the death penalty. The possession of even small quantities of “soft drugs” for recreational purposes can result in lengthy jail sentences.
- Carefully consider your safety and the implications of accidents if you hire a motorcycle or jet ski and seek advice on any restrictions that may apply (such as insurance cover if you are not licensed to ride a motorcycle in Australia). You should check with your travel insurer whether these activities are covered by your policy. You may be detained and arrested by police following jet ski and motorcycle accidents until compensation, often in thousands of dollars, can be negotiated between parties.
- Australian travellers continue to report harassment and threats of violence by jet ski operators on beaches across Thailand, and particularly in Phuket, Pattaya, Koh Samui and Koh Phangan.
- Tourists may be exposed to scams and more serious criminal activity in Thailand. Be aware that food and drink spiking occurs in Thailand, including around popular backpacker destinations such as Khao San Road in Bangkok the night-time entertainment zones in Bangkok, Pattaya and Phuket, and during the Full Moon Party on Koh Phangan.
- Travellers planning to attend Full Moon parties at Koh Phangan and other locations should carefully consider personal safety issues and take appropriate precautions. See our Partying Overseas travel bulletin for advice on the risks you may face when attending Full Moon parties and tips on how to avoid becoming a victim.
- We strongly advise you not to travel at this time to the southern provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Songkhla or overland to and from the Malaysian border through these provinces due to high levels of ongoing violence in these regions, including terrorist attacks and bombings resulting in deaths and injuries on an almost daily basis. Since January 2004, possibly as many as five thousand people have been killed and many more injured, including a number of foreigners. If you are in these provinces, you should consider leaving.
- We advise you to exercise particular caution in the areas surrounding the Preah Vihear Temple (known as Khao Pro Viharm temple in Thailand) and the Ta Kawi and Ta Muen Thom temples on the Thailand-Cambodia border due to the presence of unexploded ordnance. There was renewed fighting in the area in early 2011 and there continues to be a military presence in these areas.
- Be a smart traveller. Before heading overseas:
  - organise comprehensive travel insurance and check what circumstances and activities are not covered by your policy. Remember that if you cannot afford travel insurance you cannot afford to travel to Thailand.
  - register your travel and contact details, so we can contact you in an emergency
  - subscribe to this travel advice to receive free email updates each time it’s reissued.

Keep in touch

While travelling it is important to keep in regular touch with your family and let them know of any changes to your travel plans. You may be having a great time on your holiday but forgetting to contact family and friends can cause them needless stress and worry. Each year, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s consular service receives hundreds of calls from concerned families who have not heard from travellers and are concerned for their safety.
To save your family and friends needless worry:
- leave a copy of your itinerary with your family
- register your travel plans or in person at any Australian Embassy, High Commission or Consulate
- establish an email address that you can access overseas
- activate global roaming on your mobile phone but keep in mind your mobile phone may not work in some remote areas
- contact your family and friends immediately if there is a natural disaster, major accident or terrorist attack in the area you are in, to let them know you are safe
- advise your family how regularly they can expect to hear from you and stick to your word.

Stay safe

There are a number of practical steps you can take to avoid running into difficulties and dangerous situations and stay safe overseas.

Money and valuables
Before departure:
- organise a variety of ways of accessing your money overseas, such as credit cards, travellers' cheques and cash
- check with your bank whether your ATM card will work overseas
• make two photocopies of valuables such as your passport, tickets, visas and travellers’ cheques. Keep one copy with you in a separate place to the original and leave another copy with someone at home.

While overseas:
• don’t carry too much cash and remember that expensive watches, jewellery and cameras may be tempting targets for thieves
• wherever possible, leave passports, travellers’ cheques and other valuables in a safety deposit box or safe at your hotel
• if you have to carry them with you, keep your passport and valuables in something that can be warn around the neck, under your clothes and out of sight
• lock your baggage when unattended, particularly at airports, train stations and on buses.

Personal safety
While overseas:
• be wary of food and drink spiking and never leave food or drink unattended
• comply with local dress codes and cultural sensitivities (this applies to both male and female travellers)
• don’t hitch-hike
• avoid unlit and back streets at night
• avoid travelling alone in train carriages, and on sleeper trains keep the carriage door locked
• keep your hotel door locked and meet visitors in the lobby
• never give out your hotel name or room number to strangers
• think twice before accepting an invitation to go out with a stranger alone
• to ensure you are familiar with the types of crime and scams that might occur, check out the crime section in the travel advice for your destination.

Avoid trouble with drugs overseas
Every year Australians are arrested overseas on drugs charges. Don’t be fooled into thinking it is worth risking carrying or taking drugs overseas. Australians do get caught and the strict penalties in place, including the death penalty, do apply to foreigners.

To minimise your chances of getting into trouble with drugs overseas:
• obey the law - don’t purchase, take or travel with drugs
• lock your bags as a sensible precaution against tampering or theft
• don’t leave your bags unattended in public areas
• don’t leave your bags in the care of a stranger
• never carry anything into or out of another country for someone else
• ensure your medicines are not considered illegal drugs overseas by contacting the nearest embassy of the country you are visiting before departing.

Every year the Australian Government provides consular assistance to Australians who have been arrested or jailed overseas for drug offences.

In the event that you are arrested on drug charges overseas, be aware that:
• countries like Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam impose tough penalties including the death penalty and life imprisonment
• in some countries the possession of small quantities of so-called ‘soft drugs’ can also attract jail sentences or heavy fines
• as soon as you arrive in another country, you are subject to that country’s local laws
• ignorance of local laws is not a valid defence
• following your arrest you have the right to contact the Australian Government, but consular assistance cannot override local law, even where local laws may appear harsh by Australian standards.

Health
• On 10 August 2010, the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced it had moved to a pandemic period in response to pandemic (H1N1) 2009. The virus is expected to remain as a seasonal influenza virus and local outbreaks may occur. For more information see the WHO website.
• We strongly recommend that you take out comprehensive travel insurance that will cover any overseas medical costs, including medical evacuation, before you depart. Confirm that your insurance covers you for the whole time you’ll be away and check what circumstances and activities are not included in your policy. Remember, regardless of how healthy and fit you are, if you can’t afford travel insurance, you can’t afford to travel. The Australian Government will not pay for a traveller’s medical expenses overseas or medical evacuation costs.
• Your doctor or travel clinic is the best source of information about preventive measures, immunisations (including booster doses of childhood vaccinations) and disease outbreaks overseas. The World Health Organization (WHO) provides information for travellers and our TravelWell brochure also provides useful tips for staying healthy while travelling overseas.
• The standard of medical facilities throughout Thailand varies. While private hospitals with international standard facilities can be found in major cities, services can be limited elsewhere. Private hospitals generally require confirmation of insurance or a guarantee of payment before admitting a patient. Costs can be very expensive. Generally, serious illnesses and accidents can be treated at private or public hospitals in Bangkok and other large cities. However, medical evacuation to a destination with the required facilities may be necessary in some cases at considerable cost.
• Decompression chambers are located near popular dive sites in Koh Tao, Koh Samui, Phuket, Pattaya and Bangkok.
• Stings from jellyfish and other marine animals can be fatal. You should seek advice from local authorities, your tour operator or hotel regarding seasonal bathing conditions, recommended precautions and other potential dangers.

• “Medical tourism”, including for cosmetic and sex-change operations, is common. Australians should ensure that they are not lured to discount or uncertified medical establishments where standards can be lacking resulting in serious and possibly life-threatening complications. Hospitals and clinics have been known to refuse compensation to patients not satisfied with the results of cosmetic surgery.

• Malaria risk exists throughout the year in rural areas of the country, particularly near the borders with Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. Thai authorities have reported an increase in dengue fever cases and a number of deaths. There is no vaccination or specific treatment available for dengue fever. Other insect-borne diseases (including chikungunya fever, Japanese encephalitis and filariasis) also occur in many areas. We encourage you to: consider having vaccinations before travelling; take prophylaxis against malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases where necessary; ensure your accommodation is mosquito proof; and take measures to avoid insect bites, including using an insect repellent at all times and wearing long, loose fitting, light coloured clothing.

• The mosquito-borne disease Japanese encephalitis is found throughout many regions of North, South and South-East Asia and Papua New Guinea. A Japanese encephalitis vaccine is registered for use and is currently available in Australia. For further details please consult your travel health doctor.

• The rate of HIV/AIDS infection in Thailand is high. You should exercise appropriate precautions if engaging in activities that expose you to risk of infection.

• Water-borne, food-borne, parasitic and other infectious diseases (including tuberculosis, cholera, hepatitis, leptospirosis, typhoid, and rabies) are prevalent with outbreaks occurring from time to time. We encourage you to consider having vaccinations before travelling. We advise you to boil all drinking water or drink bottled water, avoid ice cubes and raw and undercooked food, and avoid unpasteurised dairy products. Seek medical advice if you have a fever or are suffering from diarrhoea.

• Australians travelling to Chiang Mai should be aware that in early 2011 a number of deaths and illness occurred at several tourist hotels catering to foreign guests over a period of almost two months. Thai authorities investigated these deaths and illnesses but could not determine the exact cause. The investigation concluded that a likely cause in some cases was the use of pesticides in hotel rooms. The type of pesticide could not be confirmed. Thai authorities are taking steps to reduce the risk of pesticide exposure in hotels in Chiang Mai. Authorities in Chiang Mai have asserted that the city is safe for tourists. You should make your own enquiries of hotel staff and tour operators to ensure your accommodation is healthy and safe. Australians who experience severe sudden multiple vomiting with or without diarrhoea, should seek medical attention immediately.

• Avoid temporary ‘black henna’ tattoos as they often contain a dye which can cause serious skin reactions. For further information, see the Australasian College of Dermatologists’ website.

• Smoke haze: There is smoke haze across some parts of north and north-east Thailand usually during March to April. The high levels of air pollution may aggravate bronchial, sinus or asthma conditions. Keep up-to-date with advice of local authorities and seek medical advice on appropriate precautions. Regular air quality reports are available from the National Environment Agency.

• Avian influenza: The World Health Organization (WHO) has confirmed human deaths from avian influenza in Thailand. The Department of Health and Ageing advises Australians who reside in Thailand for an extended period to consider, as a precautionary measure, having access to influenza antiviral medicine for treatment. Long-term residents are at a greater risk of exposure to avian influenza over time. You should seek medical advice before taking antiviral medicines. Australians intending to travel to Thailand for shorter periods are at much lower risk of infection but should discuss the risk of avian influenza with their doctor as part of their routine pre-travel health checks.

• If the avian influenza virus mutates to a form where efficient human-to-human transmission occurs, it may spread quickly and local authorities could move quickly to impose restrictions on travel. Australian travellers and long-term residents in Thailand should be prepared to take personal responsibility for their own safety and well-being, including deciding when to leave an affected area and ensuring they have appropriate contingency plans in place. Australians in Thailand should monitor the travel advice and Avian Influenza bulletin for updated information and advice, and ensure that their travel documents, including passports and visas for any non-Australian family members, are up-to-date in case they need to depart at short notice.

• The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) has confirmed cases of avian influenza in birds in a number of countries throughout the world. For a list of these countries, visit the OIE website.

Safety and Security

Terrorism

Australians should be aware that there is a threat of terrorist attack in Thailand, including in Bangkok. We continue to receive reports that terrorists may be planning attacks against a range of targets, including locations frequented by tourists and foreigners.

Thai authorities have on a number of occasions warned of the possibility of bombings in Thailand to coincide with symbolic dates or holidays, including in Bangkok and the southern provinces.

Several explosions occurred on 14 February 2012 in the area of Sukhumvit Soi 71, Bangkok resulting in injuries to five people. Earlier, in January 2012, Thai authorities made an arrest and seized materials in Bangkok in relation to an alleged terrorist plot targeting tourist areas.

In planning your activities, consider the kinds of places known to be terrorist targets and the level of security provided. These include places frequented by foreigners such as embassies, shopping malls, markets, banks, clubs, hotels, restaurants, bars, nightclubs, schools, places of worship, outdoor recreation events, beach resorts and tourist areas. Public buildings, public transport, airports and sea ports are also potential targets for attack.

Southern provinces - Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Songkhla: We strongly advise you not to travel at this time to the southern provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Songkhla, or to overland to and from the Malaysian border through these provinces due to high levels of ongoing violence in these regions. This includes travel by train between Thailand and Malaysia.
In recent years almost daily attacks, many of which have caused deaths and serious injuries, have taken place in these areas. Bombings and shootings are commonplace in these areas. Anon and beheadings have occurred. The Thai Government has warned tourists not to travel to these areas. Since January 2004, there has been heightened tension in these four southern provinces, where there continues to be violent incidents. In this period, possibly as many as five thousand people have been killed and many more injured, including foreigners. An Australian was one of seven people injured in a bomb blast in Yala province in May 2007.

Bombings can occur in close succession and proximity in order to target those responding to the initial explosions. Over the past few years, there have been numerous instances of multiple explosions occurring across a range of locations in southern Thailand.

Targets have included civilians and members of the security forces, tourist hotels and bars, banks, cinemas and other entertainment venues, shops, markets, supermarkets, schools, places of worship, petrol stations, transport infrastructure including Hat Yai international airport, railways and trains. Further such incidents cannot be ruled out and could occur at anytime.

Recent attacks include:

- on 31 March 2012, a number of attacks occurred in Songkhla, Yala and Pattani provinces in southern Thailand. Two car bombs in Yala’s town centre killed at least nine people and injured over 100. Shortly afterwards, a car bomb killed four people, including two Malaysian tourists, and injured around 300 at a hotel and shopping mall in Hat Yai in Songkhla. An explosion outside a shop in Pattani injured six people.

- on 25 October 2011, a series of 21 explosions in Yala province killed three people and injured 54. This followed two bombings and a shooting on 23 October 2011 in Narathiwat province which killed seven people.

- on 16 September 2011, six people were killed - including four Malaysian tourists - and over 100 injured in a coordinated attack of three bombs in Sungai Kolok town, Narathiwat province.

Australians in Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Songkhla provinces may be caught up in violence or terrorist attacks directed at others. If you are in these provinces, you should consider leaving. If you decide to stay in the southern provinces, you should ensure you have the appropriate personal security measures in place.

Terrorism is a threat throughout the world. You can find more information about this threat in our General Advice to Australian Travellers.

Civil unrest/political tension

Large scale political demonstrations and related incidents in Thailand over the past couple of years have resulted in a number of fatalities and injuries.

You should avoid protests and political rallies, and security deployments associated with such events.

You should monitor developments that might affect your safety in Thailand, including the possibility of further violent civil unrest and the risk of terrorism.

Border regions

Thai-Cambodia border: Australians intending to visit temples along the Thai-Cambodia border should be aware of the ongoing border dispute that has resulted in fighting as recently as April 2012. In recent years conflict has occurred in the area surrounding the Preah Vihear temple (known as Khao Pra Yiram temple in Thailand) located in the border region between Siaksat Province in Thailand and Preah Vihear Province in Cambodia. Conflict has also occurred in the area surrounding the Ta Kwai temple (known as Ta Krabi temple in Cambodia) and Ta Muen Thom temple in Cambodia. Temples along the Thai-Cambodia border in Surin province. Fatalities have been reported. Tourist attractions and border crossing points may be closed with little or no notice. There is a risk in border areas from landmines and unexploded military ordnance.

Thai-Burma border: There have been instances of fighting and banditry along some sections of the Thai-Burma border. This includes fighting between the military and armed opposition groups as well as clashes between Thai security forces and armed criminal groups, such as drug traffickers. Armed clashes between Burmese military and armed opposition groups inside Burma may cause border closures, occasional incidents of explosives falling inside Thailand and an influx of Burmese refugees. In the event of unrest in Burma, you should monitor media reports and follow the instructions of Thai officials.

Travellers who have attempted illegal border crossings have been detained and deported from Thailand. You should also be aware that bandits may target foreigners travelling through national parks located near border regions.

Crime

Sexual assault, food and drink spiking, assault and robbery against foreigners occurs in Thailand, including around popular backpacker and tourist destinations such as Khao San Road in Bangkok, the night-time entertainment zones in Bangkok, Pattaya and Phuket, and during Full Moon and other parties on Koh Phangan.

Over the past two years, Embassy consular officers have assisted several Australians who were victims of sexual assault. See our brochure Sexual Assault Overseas for further information on how to avoid becoming a victim of sexual assault and the assistance available to victims.

The Full Moon and other parties at Koh Phangan and in other locations regularly result in reports of sexual assaults, deaths, arrests, robbery, injuries, drug abuse and lost travel documents. Travellers contemplating attendance should carefully consider personal safety issues and take appropriate precautions. See our Partying Overseas travel bulletin for advice on the risks you may face when attending Full Moon and similar parties and tips on how to avoid becoming a victim.

Australians planning to celebrate “Schoolies Week” in Thailand should be aware that in the past Australians have had serious accidents and injuries as a result of consumption of alcohol, and have been arrested for theft and/or possession of narcotics. You should behave in a responsible and culturally sensitive manner. The costs for medical services can be very expensive and penalties for
Australians who have lost large sums of money from property purchases and in time share schemes, card game scams and other fraudulent activity. There have been recent complaints from Australians who have lost large sums of money from property purchases and in time share schemes in Phuket. Australians should be particularly careful and thoroughly research any company offering properties for sale or time share arrangements before entering into an agreement.

Due to the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, victims of violent crime, especially rape, are strongly encouraged to seek immediate medical assistance.

 Petty crime is common. Money and passports have been stolen from rooms (particularly in cheaper hotels and hostels) and from bags on public transport. Items have been removed from luggage stored below buses and travellers have reported being drugged and robbed during bus journeys. Tourists have also been robbed after the bags they were carrying were snatched by thieves on motorcycles or were sliced open by razor blades. Beware of pickpockets in crowded markets and shopping streets. When visiting these areas leave credit and other cards and licences that are not required locked in a hotel safe or be extra vigilant when carrying these items.

Australian travellers continue to report harassment and threats of violence by jet ski operators on tourist beaches, particularly in Phuket, Pattaya, Koh Samui and Koh Phangan. Many travellers have reported that, after returning hired jet skis, they have been confronted by gangs claiming that the tourist damaged the jet ski. There have been reported instances of such gangs threatening violence, including at knifepoint, if a large sum of money in compensation for the alleged damage is not paid. Australians hiring jet skis should check the jet ski for damage, including underneath, before riding and take photographs of the jet ski that may be helpful in the resolution of disputes.

Operators may request your passport as a deposit or guarantee before hiring jet skis or motorbikes. If there is a dispute about damage to a rented jet ski or motorbike, rental operators may try to keep your passport until they receive compensation. Passports are valuable documents that should be appropriately protected. We recommend that Australians do not provide passports as deposits or guarantees.

Credit card and ATM fraud involving ‘skimming’ machines, which can store card data, can occur. You should monitor transaction statements and only use ATMs in secure locations such as banks, shops or malls.

Many travellers fall victim to scams after accepting offers from people recommending or offering various goods or services, particularly with shopping for jewellery and gems. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) can provide official advice on purchasing jewellery and gems.

There have been reports that shop attendants at duty-free shops in international airports have added extra items to bags at checkout counters or not charged the full amount for items purchased. Travellers have then been accused of shoplifting after leaving the shop. There are substantial penalties for shoplifting including fines and imprisonment. You should ensure that all items placed in bags at checkouts are listed on receipts.

Travellers have also lost large sums of money through bogus investment, property rental and time share schemes, card game scams and other fraudulent activity. There have been recent complaints from Australians who have lost large sums of money from property purchases and in time share schemes in Phuket. Australians should be particularly careful and thoroughly research any company offering properties for sale or time share arrangements before entering into an agreement.

Money and valuables

Before you go, organise a variety of ways to access your money overseas, such as credit cards, travellers’ cheques, cash, debit cards or cash cards. Australian currency and travellers’ cheques are not accepted in many countries. Consult your bank about the most appropriate currency to carry and whether your ATM card will work overseas.

If you are travelling on a restricted budget, it is important to ensure you have access to enough money to cover unexpected costs. For example, you may have a problem that prevents you taking your scheduled flight. Restrictions, such as tickets being non-refundable or non-transferable, apply to most discounted airfares, or you may need to pay a substantial fee to change your travel dates. If you lose your passport you will be delayed and you would have to pay for a replacement. If you fall ill and need medical treatment, even if you have insurance, it is likely you will need to cover some costs yourself. At the minimum, it is essential to have access to enough money to cover a replacement ticket home, several nights hotel accommodation, and extra for unexpected emergencies.

Make two photocopies of valuables such as your passport, tickets, visas and travellers’ cheques. Keep one copy with you in a separate place to the original and leave another copy with someone at home. While travelling, don’t carry too much cash and remember that expensive watches, jewellery and cameras may be tempting targets for thieves.

As a sensible precaution against luggage tampering, including theft, lock your luggage. Information on luggage safety is available from Australia’s Civil Aviation Safety Authority.

Your passport is a valuable document that is attractive to criminals who may try to use your identity to commit crimes. It should always be kept in a safe place. You are required by Australian law to report a lost or stolen passport. If your passport is lost or stolen overseas, report it online or contact the nearest Australian Embassy, High Commission or Consulate as soon as possible.

You are required to pay an additional fee to have a lost or stolen passport replaced. In some cases, the Government may also restrict the length of validity or type of replacement passports.

For Parents

If you are planning on placing your children in schools or childcare facilities overseas we encourage you to research the standards of security, care and staff training within those establishments. You should exercise the same precautions you would take before placing children into schools or childcare facilities in Australia.

Ideas on how to select childcare providers are available from the smarttraveler Children’s Issues page, Child Wise and the National Childcare Accreditation Council.

Local Laws

When you are in Thailand, be aware that local laws and penalties, including ones that may appear harsh by Australian standards, do apply to you. If you are arrested or jailed, the Australian Government will do what it can to help you but we can’t get you out of trouble or out of jail. Information on what Australian consular officers can and cannot do to help Australians in trouble.
overseas is available from the Consular Services Charter.

In Thailand penalties for drug offences are very severe and include the death penalty. The possession of even small quantities of “soft drugs” for recreational purposes can result in lengthy jail sentences and deportation.

Almost all forms of gambling (other than at a few major race tracks) are illegal in Thailand. There can be heavy penalties for illegal gambling of any form.

Some Australian criminal laws, such as those relating to money laundering, bribery of foreign public officials, terrorism and child sex tourism, apply to Australians overseas. Australians who commit these offences while overseas may be prosecuted in Australia.

Australians who overstay their visas for longer than 90 days may be required to pay the overstayed fine you may be arrested, taken to court, charged with a visa offence, and required to serve a lengthy prison sentence in lieu of the fine. Travellers who have overstayed their visas may be imprisoned, deported and placed on an immigration blacklist to prevent them returning to Thailand.

Overstaying your visa in Thailand is considered a very serious offence and may result in prolonged arrest and detention. Travellers who overstay entry permits may not be allowed to leave Thailand until a fine is paid. The fine is currently 500 Baht per day, up to a maximum of 20,000 Baht. If you can not afford to pay the overstays fine you may be arrested, taken to court, charged with a visa offence, and required to serve a lengthy prison sentence in lieu of the fine. Travellers who have overstayed their visas may be imprisoned, deported and placed on an immigration blacklist to prevent them returning to Thailand.

It is illegal to work without a work permit. In the past, some employers (particularly schools, fitness centres, securities telemarketers and currency traders, and also other businesses) have promised to arrange work permits but have not and their employees have consequently been arrested, jailed and deported from Thailand.

Health Issues

We strongly recommend that you take out comprehensive travel insurance that will cover any overseas medical costs, before you depart. Confirm that your insurance covers you for the whole time you'll be away and check what circumstances and activities are not included in your policy. Remember, if you can’t afford travel insurance, you can’t afford to travel.

The standard of medical facilities throughout Thailand varies. While private hospitals with international standard facilities can be found in major cities, services can be limited elsewhere. Private hospitals generally require confirmation of insurance or a guarantee of payment before admitting a patient.

Costs can be very expensive. Generally, serious illnesses and accidents can be treated at private or public hospitals in Bangkok and other large cities. However, medical evacuation, to a destination with the required facilities may be necessary in some cases. Costs would be considerable.

“Medical tourism,” including for cosmetic and sex-change operations, is common. Australians should ensure that they are not lured to discount or uncertified medical establishments where standards can be lacking, resulting in serious and possibly life-threatening complications.

Malaria risk exists throughout the year in rural areas of the country, particularly near the borders with Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. Other insect-borne diseases (including dengue fever, Japanese encephalitis and filariasis) also occur in many areas. We encourage you to take prophylaxis against malaria where appropriate, and to take measures to avoid insect bites, including using insect repellent at all times.

Water-borne, food-borne, parasitic and other infectious diseases (including tuberculosis, cholera, hepatitis, leptospirosis, typhoid, and rabies) are prevalent with outbreaks occurring from time to time. We encourage you to consider having vaccinations before travelling. We advise you to boil all drinking water or drink bottled water, avoid ice cubes and raw and undercooked food, and avoid unpasteurised dairy products.

The rate of HIV/AIDS infection in Thailand is high. You should exercise appropriate precautions if you are engaged in activities that expose you to risk of infection. You can find out more information at the Department of Health and Ageing.

Smoke Haze: There is smoke haze across some parts of North and North-East Thailand usually during March to April. The high levels of air pollution may aggravate bronchial, sinus or asthma conditions. Keep up to date with advice of local authorities and seek medical advice on appropriate precautions. Regular air quality reports are available from Thailand’s National Environment Agency.

Decompression chambers are located near popular dive sites throughout Thailand in Koh Tao, Koh Samui, Phuket, Pattaya and Bangkok.

Avoid temporary “black henna” tattoos as they often contain a dye which can cause serious skin reactions. For further information see the Australasian College of Dermatologists’ website.
Avian influenza: The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) has confirmed cases of avian influenza in birds in a number of countries throughout the world. For a list of these countries, visit the OIE website. For information on our advice to Australians on how to reduce the risk of infection and on Australian Government precautions see our travel bulletin on avian influenza.

There have been human cases of avian influenza in Thailand. The Department of Health and Ageing advises Australians who reside in Thailand for an extended period to consider, as a precautionary measure, having access to influenza antiviral medicine for treatment. Long term residents are at a greater risk of exposure to avian influenza over time. Medical advice should be sought before antiviral medicines are commenced. Australians intending to travel to Thailand for shorter periods are at much lower risk of infection but should discuss the risk of avian influenza with their doctor as part of their routine pre-travel health checks.

If the avian influenza virus mutates to a form where efficient human-to-human transmission occurs, it may spread quickly and local authorities could move quickly to impose restrictions on travel. Australian travellers and long-term residents in Thailand should be prepared to take personal responsibility for their own safety and well-being, including deciding when to leave an affected area and ensuring they have appropriate contingency plans in place. Australians in Thailand should monitor the travel advice and bulletin for updated information and advice, and ensure that their travel documents, including passports and visas for any non-Australian family members, are up to date in case they need to depart at short notice.

In September 2005 the Australian Government decided as a precautionary measure to hold a limited supply of the antiviral medicine oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and protective face masks at its embassy in Thailand. The antivirals would primarily be used to protect emergency staff providing consular and other essential services in the event of a widespread outbreak of avian influenza amongst humans. Australian missions will not be in a position to provide influenza antiviral medicines to Australians in affected areas and it is the responsibility of individual Australians to secure their own supply of such medicines (such as Tamiflu or Relenza), if required.

Your doctor or travel clinic is the best source of information about preventive measures, immunisations and disease outbreaks overseas. The World Health Organization (WHO) provides information for travellers and our ‘Traveling Well’ brochure also provides useful tips for staying healthy while travelling overseas.

Where to Get Help

In Thailand, you can obtain consular assistance from the:

**Australian Embassy**
37 South Sathorn Road,
Bangkok, THAILAND
Telephone (66 2) 344 6300
Facsimile (66 2) 344 6310

If you are travelling to Thailand, whatever the reason and however long you’ll be there, we encourage you to register with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. You can register online or in person at any Australian Embassy, High Commission or Consulate. The information you provide will help us to contact you in an emergency – whether it is a natural disaster, civil disturbance or a family issue.

In Australia, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra may be contacted on (02) 6261 3305.

This Advice was issued on Tuesday, 10 April 2007, 18:49:46, EST.

When you are in Thailand, be aware that local laws and penalties, including ones that may appear harsh by Australian standards, do apply to you. Australians have been arrested and sentenced to jail for making false statements to police. If you are arrested or jailed, the Australian Government will do what it can to help you but we can’t get you out of trouble or out of jail.

Information on what Australian consular officers can and cannot do to help Australians in trouble overseas is available from the Consular Services Charter.

**Foreigners are required to carry identification at all times.**

In Thailand, penalties for drug offences are severe and include the death penalty. The possession of even small quantities of “soft drugs” for recreational purposes can result in lengthy jail sentences and deportation.

The death penalty can also be imposed for murder, rape, crimes against the state including treason, and certain offences against the monarchy.

Lengthy prison terms up to 15 years can be imposed for insulting the monarchy or defacing images of the monarch and his family. This includes destroying bank notes bearing the King’s image.

Almost all forms of gambling (other than at a few major race tracks) are illegal in Thailand. There can be heavy penalties for illegal gambling of any form.

Penalties for shoplifting, including at airports, include heavy fines and detention.

People found to be making false statements to police may be prosecuted and imprisoned. Reporting a theft that did not actually take place or lying about the circumstances of an incident may result in your arrest and imprisonment.

Some Australian criminal laws, such as those relating to money, laundering, bribery of foreign public officials, terrorism, child pornography, and child sex tourism, apply to Australian overseas. Australians who commit these offences while overseas may be prosecuted in Australia.

Australian authorities are committed to combating sexual exploitation of children by Australians overseas. Australians may be prosecuted at home under Australian child sex tourism and child pornography laws. These laws provide severe penalties for up to 25 years imprisonment for Australians who engage in child sexual exploitation while outside of Australia. A number of Australians have been arrested in Thailand for these crimes.

Local customs

Deliberate transgressions from local customs, such as showing the soles of your feet or touching the top of a person’s head, are likely to cause grave offence. You should respect local customs and take care not to offend. If in doubt, seek local advice.