T: 1-800-985-4852
E: info@realgap.com
P: Real Gap Experience, 8 Essex Center Drive, Peabody, MA 01960

Thailand Experience 2014

Adventure Relaxation Culture

Trip Name: Thailand Experience 2014 **Trip Code:** THDY **Duration:** From 4 weeks

Trip Highlights

- **See the best of Thailand; it's four weeks of pure adventure**
- Party in Bangkok!
- Have a splash about in the waterfall pools in Erawan National Park
- Learn to cook delicious Thai food
- Volunteer in local day care centres or take part in renovation and building work
- Kick back and relax in Koh Phangan for a week
- Many of our trips overlap with the Full Moon parties; ace!

Got any questions about going to Thailand? Ask our specialist team

Overview

Experience adventure travel in Thailand with all the best bits packed into just four weeks! You'll spend a full month getting to know Asia, Thailand, Thai food, Thai people and Thai landscapes!

We'll take you to some of the best tourist spots in unspoilt Kanchanaburi and Sangklaburi and you'll have a few days to get involved with worthwhile volunteer work or get a taste for adventure whilst trekking .

To round off your ultimate Thailand experience, the trip will end with an obligatory week hanging out on the beach on the island of Koh Phangan. Well someone's got to do it!

Thailand Experience 2014

RG's Ben has 'experienced' this trip for himself, and over on the blog you can read his account!

Please note that this package is for all bookings departuring up until 31st December, 2014. Looking to do the Thailand Experience in 2015? To check out our 2015 package click here

Destination Info

A great place for adventure travel, Thailand has a population of 65 million, is located in the heart of Southeast Asia and shares borders with Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia and Myanmar. It is an area of outstanding natural beauty complemented by impressive architecture, including strikingly beautiful temples. The country is also well known for its appetising food and the people renowned for their friendly manner.

Bangkok is an interesting and mad introduction to Thailand, it is a city that has to be experienced firsthand to truly understand it's unique diversity. It has a mixture of the cosmopolitan, cultural and downright random areas, all of which are a tuktuk ride away.

Bangkok started life as a port town and has gradually grown outward to become Thailand's cultural, political and economic capital and by far the country's largest city. It's not only the capital of Thailand, it is also the central hub for backpackers travelling around the whole of South East Asia.

Did you know, while the city is known as Bangkok by most foreigners, in Thai it actually has longest place name in the world; Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahintharayutthaya Mahadilok Phop Noppharat Ratchathani Burirom Udomratchaniwet Mahasathan Amon Phiman Awatan Sathit Sakkathattiya Witsanukam Prasit, try saying that after a couple of Thai beers.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival into Bangkok
You'll be personally met on arrival at Bangkok airport by our friendly co-ordinators. They will take you to the youth hostel on Khao San Road. Depending on when you arrive, you can relax or explore this exciting capital. This is a great opportunity to have fun, make friends with your fellow travellers and get to know the co-ordinators. In the evening your local RG team will organise a night on Khao San Road, a great way to bond with your fellow Experience travellers.

Overnight in Bangkok.

Day 2: Explore Bangkok
A Bangkok tour is included. The tour will start around 10am and will include a visit to Grand Palace (entrance fee not included), Wat Po, Reclining Buddha, Wat Arun, a river trip and then finally Koh San Road.

In the morning your local team will meet with you to give an overview of your Real experience in Thailand. Once the talk has finished you will be given some time to prepare for the Bangkok tour. The tour starts with a canal boat trip showing an alternative side to the city away from the standard tourist trail. From the boat you will disembark on the main tourist area visiting: the Grand Palace, Wat Po, the so-called Reclining Buddha, Wat Arun and a river trip. Late afternoon you will head back towards the Khaosan Road and the hotel. Here you can either rest in preparation for a night out or go shopping in and around the Khaosan area. You will meet up with the group from around 8pm for the welcome meal and continue onto Khaosan's infamous night scene.

Khoasan Road is the famous backpacker street in the Banglamphu area. This fascinating and lively hub of tourist activity is one of the most popular and intriguing parts of Bangkok. It has loads of bars, restaurants, internet cafes, shops and a few clubs. The sidewalks are lined with stalls selling cheap clothes, bags, shoes, music and souvenirs - the perfect place to practice your bargaining skills. Those that want to stay out late will need to make their own way back to the accommodation. Our co-ordinators can advise you on how to do this.

Overnight in Bangkok, breakfast included.

Day 3: Travel to Kanchanaburi
There is no rush today - have a lie in, have a lazy breakfast or do some last minute shopping. Around lunchtime, the group will travel by bus/train to Kanchanaburi. The journey will take around 2.5 hours. You will be shown to your guest house accommodation where you will spend the next five nights.

Kanchanaburi is a lovely town located 130km west of Bangkok. It is situated on the River Kwai and is the home of the famous Bridge on the River Kwai. There is a lot to do in this friendly town and plenty of restaurants and bars. We have a fun itinerary planned for you but there is also free time to do some optional extra activities.

There will be plenty of time to unpack, relax and you can even take a dip in the hotel swimming pool. The hotel is situated on the river, approx 5-10 minutes (by tuk tuk or taxi) outside of the town. The rooms are twin share and have air conditioning. Breakfast will be provided daily during your stay. We have arranged a fun evening with a meal on the banks of the River Kwai. The group will enjoy a tasty dinner whilst taking in the views of the River Kwai. After dinner you can visit the local town.

Overnight in Kanchanaburi, breakfast and dinner included.

Day 4: Erawan National Park and Waterfalls
You will visit the exquisite Erawan waterfalls in Erawan National Park. Pretty, beautiful and fun are just a few words that describe this lovely place. There are seven tiers of waterfalls, each feeding gorgeous, freshwater pools that you can swim in. You can also explore the falls by a series of tracks that lead you to the various falls across wooden footbridges. A useful tip to know is the best pool for swimming is level two (which gets the most crowded).

Overnight in Kanchanaburi, breakfast included.

Day 5: Thai Cooking Lesson
In the morning, you will go to the market to buy some traditional Thai ingredients which you will need to make your dishes for lunch and dinner. You will then return to your accommodation and cook out in the open air.

Overnight in Kanchanaburi, breakfast included.

Day 6: Temple Tour

Today you will visit three different temples, two in the morning which have spectacular views and then after lunch you will go to the last temple where you will learn about Buddhism and have the opportunity to try and meditate.

Overnight in Kanchanaburi, breakfast included.

Day 7: Free Day
You can relax around the pool, enjoy a few drinks in the lively bars, do some sight-seeing, anything you want. Our co-ordinators will give you advice on what to do in the local area.

Overnight in Kanchanaburi, breakfast included

Day 8: Travel to Sangkhlaburi
Today we leave Kanchanaburi and travel to Sangkhlaburi by minivan. This will take approximately three hours. On the way you will visit Hell Fire Pass - a Railway built in World War II, mainly by prisoners of war, and famed for the number of people that died during its construction. Sangkhlaburi is a beautiful and unspoilt area of Thailand. There are stunning views, friendly local people and there is plenty to do and see. The local town is very small that very few tourists get to visit, however has everything you need including shops, internet, bank, ATM, post office, bars, restaurants and a medical centre.

Overnight in Sangkhlaburi, breakfast included.

Day 9: Sangkhlaburi
Today you will receive a detailed orientation. You will be introduced to Thailand and its people, culture, language, history, attitudes and customs. You will be shown around the local area and amenities. You will receive more information about the programme and more details about the project work available.

Overnight in Sangkhlaburi, breakfast included.

Days 10 – 14: Volunteer
This might be adventure travel in Thailand but you also have the chance to help with some much needed community work.

Those who choose the standard Thailand Experience will get stuck-in with short to medium term projects that will make a massive difference to the community. An example of a previous project is that Experience customers in 2011 built a 1km water pipe that now supplies water to a village of 400 people!

If you would like to get involved more with the local children why not choose the community option;

Community Option: These kids require volunteers to play, interact, organise games and simply help them have fun. Many of them simply want some attention. In return you will see their eyes light up, big smiles and you will be confident that your efforts are really appreciated. With so many children and so few carers these kids really need your help and attention. We take a holistic approach to childcare so in the afternoon's, when the children are napping, our volunteers work to improve the surroundings, improve the health and safety, the grounds all to offer a better, safer and more hygienic day to day routine. From growing exotic fruits to common garden vegetables to small building projects or playing games with the children, whatever is needed at that time, you'll be helping to support the local community and children.

Overnight in Sangkhlaburi. Breakfast included. Some volunteer projects are a good distance from Sangklaburi town. You may be asked to spend a few nights in the local village to maximise your volunteer time.

Days 15 and 16: Time to relax and explore Sangkhlaburi

After all the exertion of the last 14 days, and your volunteering, these couple of days are a great opportunity to rest up a bit, relax and enjoy exploring the local area. There are lots of things you can do from exploring markets and villages, to swimming and boating or simply kick back, take in the views and charge your batteries for the next stage of the trip. Optional activities may be made available to you, so if you'd like to get involved you'll be able to pay locally!

Overnight in Sangkhlaburi. Breakfast included.

17 and 18: Trekking and camping
The trekking will be in the hills of Sangkhlaburi with a number of different routes taking in rivers, forests and villages. You will trek with experienced local guides. There are two days trekking of about four to six hours each day and camping overnight. Camping equipment will be provided and carried for you, you will just need to set it up on arrival and you'll need to carry a day pack with lunch and water provided to you. Please note: where you camp is weather dependent. During the monsoon season, you may stay at base camp with indoor tents.

Overnight in a village community (in a tent!). FROM MARCH 2014 Lunch and dinner included on day 17, breakfast and lunch included on day 18.

Days 19: Mon Tribe Visit

Enjoy a walk across Sangkhlaburi's famous wooded bridge to the Mon village. Visit the Mon temple and Golden Pagoda (fascinating places). After this, enjoy river rafting! Be prepared to get wet!

Overnight in Sangkhlaburi. Breakfast included.

Day 20: Waterfalls and Hot Springs

Today, we will visit hot springs. The hot spring is about 10 minutes away from the waterfall and you will stop here for a while. After the waterfalls you will have some free time before taking the overnight bus to Koh Pha Ngan. You will arrive at the port in the morning before taking a two-hour boat ride to the island.

Overnight bus, breakfast included.

Day 21: Arrival into Koh Pha Ngan

Free afternoon to settle into accommodation.

Overnight in Kho Pha Ngan.

Days 22 to 27: Beach
Your last week will be spent on the beautiful, fun and chilled out island of Koh Phangan found on the Gulf Coast. This is free time for you to do what you want, when you want, but it's also during this week that you'll get to enjoy your elephant trek!

The island is famous for its full moon party which is held on full moon night every month. This famous beach party brings thousands of party lovers to the island each month. If you miss the full moon, don't worry as the island has half moon parties and black moon parties! There is always some form of party going on! At all other times, the

island is pretty chilled out. You can relax on the stunning white sand beaches, trek through the jungle or snorkel in the clear blue water.

There is also the opportunity for you to learn the art of Muay Thai boxing or learn to scuba dive, these extra activities are not included in the programme, however your project co-ordinator can help you arrange this for you.

Overnight on the south of the island, Baan Thai. Rooms will either be a hotel room or a beach hut and twin share.

Day 28: Leave Koh Pha Ngan

Today you will travel back to Bangkok where you will spend your final night of the programme. Please note that depending on the size of the group, this transfer may be on a public bus but will always be included in the cost. The accommodation will be at the same hostel where you stayed the first two nights of the programme.

Overnight in Bangkok.

Day 29: Departure

You will need to make your own arrangements to go to the airport or continue with your independent travel plans. Our co-ordinators can give you advice and assistance with regards to transport. We advise all customers to book their flights after 6am on the programme end date to ensure you have enough time to get back to the airport after your transfer back from the islands.

Please note: Activities and itineraries are subject to change.

Why not make the most of your Thailand Experience by adding on some extra weeks of volunteering in the Sangklaburi?

We have various volunteer options for you to choose from:

Building
Child Care
Community and Elephants
Teaching

Please contact us for prices for these volunteer extensions.

If you are doing a volunteer extension after the Thailand Experience - first of all, don't worry! You will get back to Bangkok on the Friday evening from Koh Phangan and our volunteer team from the region you are heading to will be on hand to meet with you that evening (unless you are back very late - sometimes the traffic plays a role) or at breakfast on the Saturday morning at 09:00. The guides all know the volunteer team and if you talk to your guide during the Thailand Experience they will help make sure you meet up with the right people when you are back in Bangkok. You will then be transferred to the relevant project on the Saturday.

Accommodation

Accommodation will vary during your programme as you will be staying in four different locations.

Bangkok: Twin share accommodation in a hostel (two nights on arrival and one night on your last day).

Kanchanaburi: Twin share accommodation in a guesthouse with swimming pool.

Sangkhlaburi: Twin share accommodation in a hotel close to the market and shops.

Overnight bus: One night will be spent on an overnight bus when you travel from Sangkhlaburi to the island of Koh Phangan.

Koh Phangan: Twin share accommodation in a resort close to the beach. Please note the accommodation is a mixture of hotel rooms and beach huts.

You will share a room with a member of the group of the same sex. Depending on group dynamics, there may be occasions where you will share a triple room. There are fans in the bedrooms.

Please remember to inform us if you want to share a room with your friend or partner, so we can make sure you stay together throughout your trip.

The local co-ordinators will stay close by so you will easily be able to contact a member of staff should you need any assistance.

Programme Services and Facilities

Your accommodation will generally be around 10-20 minutes (either walking or by tuk tuk) from a town which has all the amenities you could need such as Internet, shops, hospital, pharmacy, banks and restaurants. You will not have easy access to any of these during any camping or trekking activities. You should inform friends and family at home that there may be a few days at a time where you are unable to get to a telephone or internet café.

Internet

There is no Internet access at your accommodation. However, there are Internet terminals in most towns and cities you will visit. They are very cheap at around 30B per hour.

Telephone

The international telephone access code for Thailand is +66. To place an outgoing, direct-dialled international call, dial +44 for the UK followed by the telephone number. For example to call our office dial +44 1892 516164.

There are also no phones at the accommodation. One option is to buy a phone card for 300B, these can be used from landlines and are a cheap way to make calls. Alternatively, if you are taking your mobile there will be signal in most major towns and cities but this may be limited in more rural areas. You will be able to buy a Thai SIM card for your mobile in Bangkok for about £5 / 6€ / $7. Please make sure you check with your phone provider that your handset is unlocked and also that you check the cost of your tariff if you choose to stick with your phone provider - calls from abroad can become very expensive.

Remember to bring your mobile phone charger and an adaptor! Also remember that signal may be very limited when in the mountains and remote areas.

Finally, don’t forget to contact your family once you are in Thailand, to let them know you have arrived safely!

Laundry

There are no washing machines at the accommodation. You can pay to get your clothes washed for you (very efficient and cheap) or you can hand wash your clothes. We recommend that you bring some travel wash with you either way.

Electricity

There will be plug sockets at your accommodation in resorts.

Lockers

Safety boxes are available at the hotels in Bangkok. At the accommodation in Kanchanaburi the owner will look after anything important by locking it in the office if you request. In Sangklaburi the accommodation has a large locking cabinet in reception where they will keep things safe and locked away. This is the same at the accommodation on resort on Koh Phangan, they will lock valuables in a locking cabinet in reception. However they, our in-country staff or Real Gap and Real Travel, can’t be held responsible for anything lost or damaged.

Meals

Breakfasts are included throughout your stay until your stay on Koh Phangan where they are not included. Most lunches and dinners are not included to allow you to enjoy eating out in local restaurants and bars and the opportunity to sample the local cuisine rather than eating at the accommodation all the time. Eating out is very cheap in Thailand, and you can eat out for as little as THB15 with an average meal out costing between THB 50 - THB 100. Please note certain volunteer projects will have lunch as they are in remote locations and some trips include lunch too.

What's Included

- Personally met on arrival
- Transfer from Bangkok airport to accommodation
- All Accommodation
- Bangkok tour
- Some breakfasts
- Tour of Kanchanaburi

What's Not Included

- Flights
- Tourist visa
- Travel insurance
- Some meals
- Return transfer to airport

What to Pack

Please note that the kit list is intended to help you plan what you may need to take with you and therefore you may not need all the listed items on your travels nor is it exhaustive. In addition it is worth noting that you can buy lots of items from the list in -country and at a very cheap price and there will be opportunities for you to shop in local markets and towns.

Also, please be aware that the weather can change considerably from winter to summer and you should pack according to when you are travelling to ensure that you have the appropriate clothing.

Personal Admin

- Passport, insurance certificates and personal documentation
- Photocopies of all the above to be left at home with your next of kin
- Spending money

- Proof of inoculations (please speak to your doctor about necessary immunisations)
- Secure, waterproof bag for documents and money: sealable plastic bags will do

General

- Personal hygiene kit, toiletries and towel
- Sunglasses (high UV protection)
- Sun cream (high factor needed)
- Small torch (head torch is preferable)
- Padlock (needed for locker in Bangkok)
- Diary and writing pens
- Camera/batteries/film or memory card
- Water bottle – at least 75cl
- Day pack/rucksack for everyday use
- Mobile phone – set for roaming
- MP3 player and headphones/speakers
- Adaptor plug
- Alarm clock/watch
- Sewing kit and pocket knife for general use
- Travel wash for clothes (biodegradable recommended)
- Travel Guide, such as Lonely Planet or Rough Guide
- Books, cards, board games etc for your free time
- Some teaching material to use in your projects (Games, books, toys, anything you like to use).

Clothing

- Sets of outdoor loose fitting cotton clothes with full arm and leg cover for cooler mornings and evenings
- Shorts and/or trousers (males) and full length long skirts (females) for project work
- T-shirts for project work
- Long sleeve tops/ trousers if trekking
- Trainers
- Casual clothes for the weekends
- Flip flops / sandals
- Rubber soled grip shoes suitable for waterfall trekking
- Swimwear
- Sun hat / Bandana
- Underwear – enough for at least 7 days, possibly more
- Pyjamas/nightwear
- Lightweight fleece or jumper
- Waterproof jacket

Medical Kit

- Hand sanitiser and wet wipes
- Anti-malarial tablets
- Personal First Aid Kit
- Personal medication e.g. prescription drugs/inhalers
- Painkillers
- Contact lenses and solution if necessary
- Plasters
- Lip Balm with SPF
- Tweezers (not in hand luggage!)
- Scissors (not in hand luggage!)
- Sanitary products for women if necessary
- Mosquito repellent (ensure it contains DEET or equivalent)

- Ear Plugs – in case you sleep next to a snorer

Minimum Age

Minimum age 18 years old. Recommended upper age limit of 30 years old.

Minimum Numbers

This trip requires minimum numbers to operate.

Flights

Your flight to Thailand should arrive at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK) on your programme start date. Your return flight or onward travel should be arranged on your programme end date.

To receive the included transfer from Bangkok airport to your accommodation your flight will need to arrive between 6am and 10pm on the programme start date.

To book your flights, please contact your travel advisor who will do their best to get you the best deal on the day. Please provide them with your full name as it is stated in your passport. Before you make the call please make sure you have your required departure dates, return dates and other details you may require.

It is important that once you have booked your flights you add these details to your online account or alternatively you can contact us with your departure date, the flight number and arrival time at your destination.

Please note: This programme requires a minimum of 10 participants to run. Please contact us to confirm whether the minimum numbers have been met for your start date, we recommend that you do not book your flights until we have confirmed these numbers and the programme will be running.

FAQs

1. **The return airport transfer is not included how much should I take and how do I arrange this?**
   It's easy to arrange you will be returned to Bangkok to the hostel on your last day, the hostel can help get you a taxi (or share a taxi) to the airport for around £10.

2. **If I decide to spend longer in Thailand after the trip by adding on one of your options who do I extend the visa?**
   To obtain the 60 day visa you must apply for this in the UK before you travel. You can apply by post or in person, it's around £28.

3. **How much extra should I budget?**
   If you're good at being careful with your money then you should budget approximately £80 a week for food (maybe a little more during the beach week) plus extra for drinks and any shopping and extra activities that you may want to do. If you're planning to eat in western restaurants or you spend money like water then you'd probably do well to double this figure!

4. **I am looking to travel with my friend can we stay and travel together?**
   Yes the accommodation is twin bedded rooms we can book you on together.

5. **Are there any extra activities you can do?**
   During your free time, there may be other extra activities you can do. They're not part of your Real Gap trip and are discretionary, so if you do think you'll want to do extra things during your free time/days, please allow extra in your budget for this.

6. **Do I need to take a sleeping bag?**
   All bedding is provided but if you wanted to take one as well then you can.

7. **Do I need to take a mosquito net?**
   This is up to you, they aren't provided but if you take care of the room and close the windows etc then you shouldn't need to take a net with you.

8. **Will there be a safe/safety deposit box available?**
   Yes, there will be somewhere for you to keep your valuables.

Police Check

This trip requires a Police Check to be carried out - please contact us for further information on how to do this.

Support & Advice

Your safety is paramount which is why all our programs have been visited and assessments have been conducted to ensure any major risks have been minimized.

In addition, you will have access to a 24 hour emergency contact number so you can contact one of our staff at any time should you need to. In addition our overseas partners and coordinators are on hand in-country to assist you.

Financial Security

We know that the last thing you want to worry about when you're planning your trip of a lifetime is whether your money is in safe hands. As a leading global gap year provider it's our job to make sure your finances are secure, so when you book with us you can be confident that we do just that.

Real Gap Experience is part of TUI Travel Plc, one of the largest travel organisations in the world, and these days in the travel industry, large means secure.

Insurance

Whether you're traveling for two weeks or two years, trekking the Amazon in Ecuador or on safari in Africa, insurance is an essential part of your adventure and will help you enjoy your travels, secure in the knowledge that you have the protection you need. In fact, everyone traveling with us must have adequate cover before their trip begins.

Of course you are free to buy insurance from any provider, however at Real Gap Experience, we have partnered with World Nomads to offer policies that have been specifically designed to meet the needs of global travel. If you think you're already covered by an existing policy, such as those offered by credit card providers, check the policy wording very carefully to ensure it covers you for your Real Gap Experience.

For more information on travel insurance please contact us to speak to one of our travel advisors.

Money Matters

The unit of currency in Thailand is the Baht (THB; symbol). There are 100 Satang to the Baht and coins come in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 25 and 50 Satang or 1, 2, 5 and 10B. Paper bills come in 20B (green), 50B (blue), 100B (red), 500B (purple) and 1000B (beige).

US Dollars are the other most widely accepted currency and credit cards can be used for a fee in most large cities or at resort hotels but are not often accepted by small locally run businesses. ATMs are found in all major cities and almost all provincial banks.
Meal, Inexpensive Restaurant around $3
Domestic beer (from a local store) $2
Domestic beer (at a restaurant) $3
Coke/Pepsi (0.33 litre bottle) $0.53
Water (1.5 litre bottle) $0.5

(Prices quoted in US Dollar)

Passports and Visas

You should ensure that you have a full passport that is valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information provided below is to help you with that process. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

Citizens of the UK, the USA, Ireland, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and most European countries do not require a visa for stays of less than 30 days. For stays of between 31 and 60 days you can obtain a 60-day tourist visa for a fee from a Thai embassy or consulate before you travel. For stays of up to 90 days, you can extend the 60-day visa for a further 30 days while you are in the country, for a fee.

Visa courier service

For those of you who would prefer to use a specialist visa service to help you obtain the right visa for your travels, we have teamed up with VisaCentral, to offer you specialist assistance and advice - making preparations for your trip easier and more straight forward.

Click on VisaCentral to find out more about their services and prices.

Cultural Considerations

Whilst parts of Thailand are developing very quickly and Bangkok can feel more modern than many Western cities, much of the country is still very poor and people have challenging lives. The accommodation you will be staying in is very basic and you will not have the luxuries that you may have in this country. Please respect that this is the way locals live and take the opportunity to experience this new way of life. The friendly people, the great atmosphere and beautiful location will more than make up for this. Most travellers enjoy this change in lifestyle. It is very healthy, refreshing and opens your mind to a new world.

Religion

Religion is an important part of Thai day-to-day life and the main religion is Buddhism. Around 4% of the country are Muslim (largely concentrated in the far south of the country) and there is a small Christian population.

Clothing

Note to all regarding clothes: Thailand is a very conservative country and, away from the beaches, people generally like to dress as smartly as possible and, even in rural areas you will see that most people are very conscious of being in clean and conservative clothes. Although no-one expects you to wear a suit and tie, and when at your project old t-shirts and shorts/jeans are totally appropriate, please do remember to cover up and try not to show too much flesh.

Boys – please note that wandering around without wearing a shirt/t-shirt is frowned upon (away from the beach) and in urban areas can draw the attention of the police.

Girls – please try not to expose too much flesh. Try to avoid t-shirts that expose too much and don't wear short shorts.

NOTE: When visiting a temple you are expected to cover up. Wear trousers or skirts and cover your shoulders, midriff and back.

There are plenty of opportunities to sunbathe and swim whilst in Thailand, so remember to take your bikini, swimsuit, swimming shorts etc. Flip-flops are the easiest and coolest footwear to take with you. Whenever you enter houses, temples, or home stays you will need to remove your shoes and leave them at the door. This will soon become habit and you won't even realise you are doing it. Remember to take some trainers with you as well for the outdoor activities.

There are many opportunities to buy cheap clothes from markets. These are cool, cheap and ideal for the climate and social norms.

Smoking, Alcohol and Drugs

Smoking and drinking is acceptable in Thailand and readily available. However, please respect other people. Smoking is not permissible in volunteer apartments or the host families' homes. Drinking is only permissible in moderation and must not impact upon any volunteer work you undertake. While we want you to have fun in your free time, antisocial behaviour will not be tolerated.

It is absolutely forbidden to carry drugs into Thailand. Being caught in possession of drugs can lead to at least a prison sentence and a hefty fine if you are lucky but remember there is still a very real threat of the death penalty for carrying drugs in Thailand. Always keep an eye on your luggage while travelling. Never bring anyone else's luggage through customs.

Bathroom Facilities

You will experience a range of different shower and toilet facilities. Unless you are staying in a hotel you will rarely have hot water. The cool water takes a little getting used to but we are sure you'll find it refreshing after a hot and humid day. Toilets will be a combination of western and Asian. Remember to put all toilet tissue in the bin provided and not in the toilet.

You'll find that many places don't have soap or toilet/tissue paper in the bathrooms. Without going into too much detail, that's what the water can be used for (as well as flushing) or often a small water spray pipe next to the toilet. It can be useful to carry a small bottle of antibacterial gel for washing hands and small packets of tissues.

Vaccinations & Health

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad. The risks to your health whilst travelling will vary depending on your general health and the type of activities you are going to be partaking in and the length of your stay.

Since we are not medically qualified, it is recommended that you consult with your Doctor or a recognised Travel Medical Advisory Service who will assess your particular health risks before recommending vaccines and/or anti-malarial tablets and advising you on what precautions you should take.

Safety

As in most countries there are people who try to take advantage of tourists. The following advice is intended to help you keep safe:

- Always keep your personal items such as passport, money and camera with you and in a safe place. You can buy mini padlocks to prevent people from going into your day sack without your permission.
- Always walk around in groups, never go off with strangers and people that you have only just met
- Never go out alone after dark
- Stick with the escorted trips. If you do go out in the evening unescorted, you do so at your own risk. Please tell the co-ordinator or your home-stay family where you are going, what time you will be back and ensure you sign the release from.
- Please do not get into fights, or arguments with local Thais. We cannot guarantee your safety and it could provoke future attacks on other travellers
- As in this country there have been reports of drinks being spiked on the islands. Please do not leave your drinks unattended and do not accept drinks from strangers.
- Most importantly of all, if you wouldn't do whilst your at home, then don't do it whilst you are away!

This information is not intended to scare you. Unfortunately, bad things can happen, as they can do in any country and we want you to be prepared. We want you to stay safe and have a good time.

We would like to add that the majority of the locals are friendly, warm and hospitable people who love meeting our travellers. Please be friendly, respectful and stay aware and you will have a great time.

We advise that you check your government's advice before travelling abroad. For UK, American and Australian customers please see the relevant links below;

UK: www.fco.gov.uk

USA: www.travel.state.gov
Australia: www.smartraveller.gov.au

ATM Theft

It is very likely that you will need to withdraw cash at some point during your travels. Please be cautious when withdrawing money from an ATM and ensure that you are vigilant of other people near the ATM, especially those that offer unsolicited assistance if your card is detained. It has been recognised that individuals are operating unlawful withdrawals by placing 'traps' in ATMs whereby personal bank cards are being detained, causing the victim to believe their card transaction has not been completed, and leaving their bank card in the ATM which is then later retrieved by the thief.

If your card is confiscated or you are concerned that your card has been tampered with, please report immediately to the bank or cancel your card.

Thailand Terrorist Threat

Thailand is one of the most popular destinations for visitors to Southeast Asia. Most visitors enjoy a trouble-free stay. However, Thailand does have a history of political instability and has experienced a number of military coups since 1932. The political future of the country remains uncertain, though the situation remains stable.

Over the past 3-4 years there have been a number of political demonstrations in Bangkok and some other urban

areas. Tensions rise and fall but other than in 2010, most protests are usually peaceful and Thais still go out of their way to be hospitable to visitors. However, it's always advisable to avoid large gatherings and listen to the advice of the team in country

Language Guide

Here are some useful phrases to remember when you get to Thailand. We also suggest you obtain a Lonely Planet or language guide for the destination(s) you are travelling to.

Hello (Male speaker) - *sawatdee krup*
Hello (Female speaker) - *sawatdee kaa*
How are you? - *sabai dee reu*
Thank you - *kop koon*
I can't speak Thai - *phoot Thai mai dai*
I don't understand - *mai kao chai*
Do you understand? - *kao chai mai*
Where is the rest room? - *hong nam yoo tee nai*
How much does this cost? - *nee tao-rai*
What is this? - *nee aria*
Good-bye - *la gon*
Sorry/Excuse me - *kor thoad*
The bill please - *Gep taang*

Food & Drink

It's normal in Thailand to eat rice dishes for breakfast and it is all part of the cultural experience. In fact, rice and noodles are served with all meals. The food is gorgeous, with fresh vegetables tasting far better than they do back home. Vegetarians will be happy, as Tofu is widely available as is plenty of fresh fruit. And meat lovers will also be tantalising their taste buds visiting the many local markets where you can buy chicken satay (marinated kebabs), beef kebabs and other types of meat. It is very cheap too. Remember to let us know before you depart if you have any special dietary requirements.

Public Holidays

When planning your trip, you should be aware of the major national holidays celebrated throughout the country. However, although businesses and government offices are closed on public holidays, tourist attractions and shops are almost never closed. The main impact on the tourist of these holidays is the increased competition for travel and accommodation from Thais who use long weekends to get away from the big city.

Weather

Thailand's equatorial climate remains tropical and warm for most of the year, with the south getting the best of the weather. The monsoon season falls between May and October, bringing warm and humid air and dipping to a minimum of 18ºC. This means that Thailand is a great destination at most times of the year, though the best months are between November and February when temperatures are comfortable and rains have slackened off.

Time

Thailand is 7 hours ahead of GMT.

Electricity

The electricity in Thailand is 220 volts and frequency 50 Hertz. Devices that do not accept this voltage will need to

be used with an adapter. Outlets in Thailand generally accept 2 types of plug:

Flat blade plug

or

Two round pins

Trip Note Disclaimer

The information contained in this trip note has been compiled with great care and is provided in good faith. Any itinerary featured is correct at time of release. However, our itineraries may change as make improvements that result from travellers' comments, our own research or from time to time as a result of reommended travel advice.

You can rest assured that it is always our goal to provide you with the most rewarding trip and experience ever!

Our Details

If you have any questions about this trip please do not hesitate to contact us and we'll be happy to answer them.

Phone: 1-800-985-4852
Email: info@realgap.com
Post: Real Gap Experience, 8 Essex Center Drive, Peabody, MA 01960
Web: www.realgap.com