

March 11, 2005

Do's and Don'ts

Thai people are tolerant and hospitable. Normally tourists will have no difficulty in adjusting to the local customs. However, they may find it useful to be aware of certain do's and don'ts.

DO's

- Always be respectful about Buddhism.
 - Dress correctly in Temples (wear sleeves, do not wear short pants etc.).
 - Don't sit on Buddha images if you want to be photographed. Sit before the image. You will insult Thai people deeply if you offend Buddhism in these ways.

- Thai people have a deep, traditional reverence for the Royal Family, and a visitor should be careful to show respect for the King, the Queen and the Royal Children.
 - Always speak respectfully about HM The King and HM The Queen.
 - The audience is expected to stand when a portrait of the King is shown during the playing of the national anthem in a cinema.
 - When attending some public event at which a member of the Royal Family is present, the best guide as to how to behave is probably to watch the crowd and do what it does.

- Always be respectful to the elderly, in every situation.

- Take your shoes off before entering a Thai house, if you are invited to visit somebody in his/her home. Do the same at other places where the Thai people do so too (for instance before entering beauty salons, hair dressers etc.). It is very common to see something like shown on the picture below when you enter a Thai house.



- Have some patience when you have to do business in a bank or in a post office. Sometimes you will have to wait for a long time. Just relax and wait for your turn! The picture below was taken in a Post Office. If you just have to buy some stamps, you may have to wait like the people on the photograph!



DON'Ts:

- Point at people or things with your feet. This is considered as highly impolite, as the feet are considered as the most inferior parts of the human body. And do not sit on the floor of a Temple with your feet pointing at the Buddha Image!

- Touch the heads of anyone including kids, even if you may see this as a form of caressing. The head is considered as the most superior part of the body, and touching this part is not a privilege for foreigners!

- Even if you are married, don't kiss in public, don't walk with your arms around each other. These things are considered very impolite in Thailand.

- Shout in public (to anybody). If you want to argue with your wife or with your children, do this in the privacy of your hotel room and **not** in public!
- Buy any precious stones on the streets. If you are familiar with prices you can buy them in (large) shops. That will normally be safe, but -again- be sure you don't pay too much. If you have any trouble, call **1155** for the Tourist Police
- Accept any offers from strangers to assist you in finding the right places to do your shopping. They will get a commission from the shops they take you to and **you** will be the person who pays for that commission (in the price you pay).

Social Values

1. **“Nam-jye”** (which literally means water from the heart). Nam-jye is very important for Thai people. When Thai people say that a person has “nam-jye,” it means that this person is happy to make sacrifices for friends and extend hospitality to strangers.
2. Thai people always say **“mai pen ray”** (never mind or it doesn't matter) when something unfortunate happens. They think that everybody and everything is acceptable. Conflicts should be avoided.
3. Thai people also have a feeling of **“geng-jay.”** They are very reluctant to impose on anyone or disturb other people.
4. Thai people are also expected to realize **“thii tam thii soong”**(literally, high place and low place). People can be “high” or “low” according to their age, family background, occupation, and professional position. They should behave and treat other people according to their own and other people's status.
 1. Body parts such as the head and face are considered **“thii soong”** (high place) and feet **“thii tam”** (low place).
 2. Thai people feel offended when someone touches or passes something to another person over their heads. They are also offended when a person points to them or at something with his foot.
 3. Thais regard the head as the highest part of the body both literally and figuratively.
 4. Thais do not place their feet on the table while sitting. Visitors are advised not to point your feet at people or object. It is considered very rude and uncivil.
 5. Young people go to considerable lengths to keep their heads lower than those of the elder ones, to avoid giving the impression of looking down" on them.
5. Thai people think that everything is acceptable. Conflicts, therefore, should be avoided.

1. The Thais think the display of losing temper, especially in public, denote poor manners. You are more apt to get what you want by keeping a cool head and concealing your emotions.
6. Buddhist monks are forbidden to touch or be touched by a woman, or to accept anything from the hand of one.
 1. If a woman has to give anything to a monk, she first hands it to a man, who then presents it.
 2. In case a woman wants to present it with her hand, the monk or novice will spread out a piece of saffron robe or handkerchief in front of him and the woman will lay down the material on the robe which is being held at one end by the monk or novice.
7. Thai people don't normally shake hands when they greet one another, but instead press the palms together in a prayer-like gesture called a **wai**. Generally a younger person wais an older, who returns it.
8. Normally Thai women are conservative. So don't touch them without their consent.
9. You can call Thai people their first names, and may use the title "Khun" (pronounce "koon" but make it shorter like "kun") for adults, both man and woman. Thais never call each other by using the family names.

Resources:

1. <http://www.kingdomthailand.com/dosanddents.htm>
2. <http://www.hasekamp.net/dodont.htm>
3. <http://www.thaishanghai.com/english/do-dont.html>
4. http://www.bangkokguidebook.com/dos_and_dents.php