

Thai Judges Delegation

Administrative Office of the Courts
Certified Court Interpreter Program

Volume I, Issue I

Special points of interest:

- Society
- Etiquette
- Did You Know That...
- Public Behavior Do's and Don'ts



Kingdom of Thailand - Background Notes

Geography:

Area: 198,114 sq. mi.
(equivalent to the size of France, or slightly smaller than Texas)
Cities: Capital--Bangkok (population 9,668,854)

People:

Nationality: Noun and adjective--Thai.
Population (2009 est.): 67.0 million
Ethnic groups: Thai 89%, other 11%.

Religions:

Buddhist 93-94%, Muslim 5-6%,
Christian 1%, Hindu, Brahmin,

other.

Languages:

Thai (official language); English is the second language of the elite; Malay and regional dialects.

Education:

Years compulsory--12. Literacy--94.9% male, 90.5% female.

Monarchy:

The monarchy is deeply revered by the Thai people and strict customs towards it are observed. Never speak disrespectfully of the Royal family; to do so is a criminal offence.

Always stand quietly when

either the Royal or National Anthem is played. The National Anthem is played daily at 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. in public places and simultaneously broadcast on television and radio. Virtually all shops and business have portraits of the King and Queen. above them.



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Society

Hierarchical Society

Thais respect hierarchical relationships.

Social relationships are defined as one person being superior to the other. Parents are superior to their children, teachers to their students, and bosses to their subordinates.

When Thais meet a stranger, they will immediately try to place you within a hierarchy so they know how you should be treated.

This is often done by asking what might be seen as very personal questions in other cultures.

Status can be determined by clothing and general appearance, age, job, education, family name, and social connections.

Thai Culture

Thai Family Values

The family is the cornerstone of Thai society. Family life is often more closely knit than in western cultures. The Thai family is a form of hierarchy with the parents at the top. Children are taught to honor their parents.

Thai Demeanor

Thais place great emphasis and

value on outward forms of courtesy such as politeness, respect, genial demeanor and self-control in order to maintain harmonious relations. Many of their rules of etiquette are by-products of the Buddhist religion. It is a non-confrontational society, in which public dispute or criticism is to be avoided at all costs.

To be openly angry with someone might attract the wrath of

the spirits, which in turn could cause violence and tragedy.

Openly criticizing a person is a form of violence as it hurts the person and is viewed as a conscious attempt to offend the person being rebuked.

Loss of face is a disgrace to a Thai so they try to avoid confrontations and look for compromises in difficult situations. If two parties disagree, one will need to have an outlet to retreat without losing face.



Meeting Etiquette

The wai is the traditional form of greeting, given by the person of lower status to the person of higher status.

Raising both hands, palms joined with the fingers pointing upwards as if in prayer, lightly touching the body somewhere between the chest and the forehead, is the standard form.

Thais generally use first rather than surnames, with the honorific title Khun before the name. Khun is an all-purpose form of address that is appropriate for both men and women.

In general, wait for your host and hostess to introduce you to the other guests. This al-

lows everyone to understand your status relative to their own, and thus know who performs the wai and how low the head should be bowed.

Thai communication is formal and non-verbal communication is often more important than verbal communication.

“It is a non-confrontational society, in which public dispute or criticism is to be avoided at all costs.”

Gift Giving Etiquette

If invited to a Thai's home, a gift is not expected, although it will be appreciated.

Gifts should be wrapped attractively, since appearance matters.

Bows and ribbons add to the sense of festivity.

Appropriate gifts are flowers,

good quality chocolates or fruit. Do not give marigolds or carnations, as they are associated with funerals.

Try to avoid wrapping a gift in green, black or blue as these are used at funerals and in mourning.

Gold and yellow are considered royal colors, so they

make good wrapping paper.

Only use red wrapping paper if giving a gift to a Chinese Thai.

Gifts are not opened when received.



Business Meeting Etiquette

- Appointments are necessary and should be made one month in advance.
- It is good idea to send a list of who will be attending the meeting and their credentials so that Thais know the relative status of the people attending the meeting and can plan properly.
- You should arrive at meetings on time as it signifies respect for the person you are meeting.
- Although most Thais will try to be on time, punctuality is a personal trait.
- Remain standing until told where to sit. The hierarchical culture has strict rules about rank and position in the group.
- Written material should be available in both English and Thai.
- You must be patient.



Dress Etiquette

- Business attire is conservative.
- Men should wear dark colored conservative business suits.
- Women should wear conservative business suits or dresses. Women need not wear hosiery.
- Since Thais judge you on your clothing and accessories, ensure that your shoes are always highly polished.

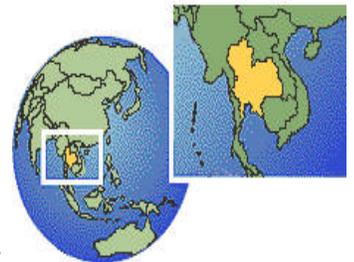


‘Thai’ in the Thai language means ‘freedom’.

So, Thailand means “land of freedom” or “land of free”.

Did You Know That...

- Thailand is bigger than the United Kingdom, Iceland, Belgium and Austria combined.
- Thai boxing is the national sport in Thailand.
- Thailand is often nicknamed as the “Land of Smiles” because of the perceived gentleness of its people.
- Thais do not like someone touching them on head. They believe that soul, which is considered extremely sacred, resides in head.
- Thailand has 5 UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- Siam was the old name of Thailand. (It was the official name of the country until 1949.)
- ‘Thai’ in the Thai language means ‘freedom’. So, Thailand means “land of freedom” or “land of the free”.



Cultural Competency

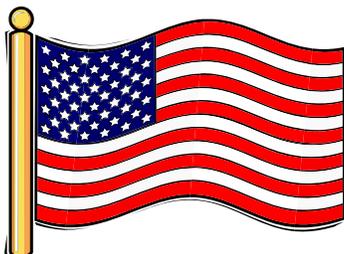
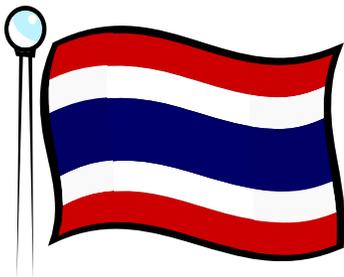
Cultural competence refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Cultural competence comprises four components:

- Awareness of one's own cultural worldview
- Attitude towards cultural differences
- Knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, and
- Cross-cultural skills.

Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures.



Public Behavior Do's and Don'ts



- When meeting a man for the first time, **a handshake is an appropriate greeting.**
- When meeting a woman for the first time, it is recommended that you smile instead of shaking her hand. The best policy is to allow a Thai woman to initiate a handshake.
- Upon meeting and departure, you can use the traditional Thai greeting by pressing your hands together as though in prayer, keeping arms and elbows close to your body, bowing your head to touch your fingers, and saying "sawatdee". (Wai)
- Smiling or nodding is a sufficient greeting for people you see on a daily basis.
- Watch your body language and facial expressions, as these will be believed over your words.
- Since Thai's judge you on your clothing and accessories, ensure that your shoes are always highly polished.
- Business cards are given out after the initial handshake and greeting. In theory, you should give your card to the most senior person first.
- Look at a business card for a few seconds before placing it on the table or in a business card case. As in most Asian countries, it is polite to make some comment about the card, even if it is only to acknowledge the address.