



# IN THAILAND

**Responsible Travel**

**Exciting • Fun • Instructive**

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## INTRODUCTION

**Responsible Travel** is to support justice and sustainability, and to ensure destinations are preserved for tomorrow's visitors. It means to make choices that support the local economy and preserve the environment; it is to respect local customs and culture. Responsible Travel is about making as low impact as possible, and we'll all become winners. This guide is not an ordinary travel guide; instead I have chosen to include information I find most relevant for people who like to travel with more responsibility, information that makes it easier to make other choices. For concerned travellers I also advise to have a look at the web pages of *ECOT* (Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism) and *TourismConcern* as they are good information sources. All companies and organisations mentioned here have their contact details in ADDRESSES at the end of the guide.

*Read this guide and consider what suits you. You can't do it all, but you can do something.*

## WORDS FROM THE AUTHOR



It isn't about denying ourselves - it's about doing things differently.

During one of my travels I visited many road side cafés which nearly all served coffee in plastic cups. It wasn't a good feeling, so after some time I went to a handicraft shop and bought myself a ceramic mug which I put on the counter when I ordered coffee. In the beginning I felt pretty stupid, but it changed after a while because of all the nice conversations I had as a result of my mug. Great memories, a beautiful souvenir and a very good feeling. All in one simple mug. And of course - lots of nice coffee.

## GOOD TO KNOW

**Card payment** is convenient but don't make it a habit. Small shops and restaurants can't afford this payment option and you may exclude them. With cash you have increased freedom of choice.

**Always ask before** you take a photo of somebody and respect a no if that is the case. Be extra attentive to tribal people and if they want payment for showing their traditional clothes, that is how it is. One alternative is to buy already prepared photos or postcards. The advantages then are that you support local work and, as well, keep away from the trouble with photographing. A good idea is to bring photos from your own country and show people. Photos are also good simple gifts.

**Buy organic** sunscreen and mosquito repellent. Chemicals on your body are not good but also the chemicals end up in the water when you have a shower, or a swim, and finally the chemicals accumulate in the environment.



**Sexual exploitation** is unfortunately common in Thailand and particularly alarming when children are the victims. If you suspect any child prostitution - inform the police. *ECPAT International* is a global network of organizations and individuals working to end all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children. For instance, ECPAT is engaged in an industry driven responsible tourism initiative called *The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism*, which combats child sex tourism while promoting sustainable, responsible tourism and the practice of corporate social responsibility. An important project worthwhile supporting. Some other organisations try to combat child exploitation by offering children a tool for a better future - education. See VOLUNTEER.

**Begging** is a complex matter. Some beggars are "fakes", while some are "real" and begging is their only way to survive. If you don't know what to do, buy some food for the beggar - at least the person got something to eat and you know your money is well spent. Please don't give sweets to kids as they don't need them and will only pester other tourists. Also, most poor people can't afford to see a dentist. You can support projects for unprivileged people if you like to help. Read about begging elephants in WILD-LIFE.

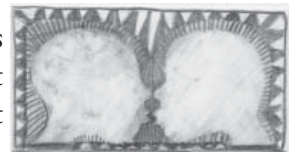
## FITTING IN

The best way to avoid painful culture shocks is to read and learn about the culture beforehand. It is much appreciated if you know a little about the culture, and if you speak even a few Thai words. Preparation will give you a more pleasant holiday.

**If you give alms** to a monk, which all Thai people do - mostly food - he will not thank you. Instead it is you that should thank the monk as he gives you an opportunity to improve your life.

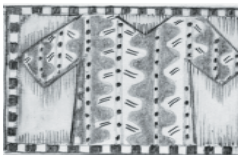
**Thai people are open**, friendly and have a big sense of humour. They are indulgent towards things that happen as they prefer to let incidents pass rather than start a conflict. Thai people will not be upset if the bus is late - if you try to have the same attitude your holiday will be simplified. Sometimes Thai people go pretty far to avoid confrontations. They don't want to put burdens on anyone's shoulders. Even if Thai people are friendly, respect their privacy and don't walk around at random in the fields, around houses and temples. It is better to do excursions with a guide.

**Intimacy** is usually not shown in public. Maybe young men hold each other's hands as show of friendship, but not much more. In the traditional society it is seen as bad behaviour to show feelings in public. Drunken people are also not appreciated.



**Thai people don't like to say "no"**. You have to listen carefully; if you don't get a direct answer, or an evasive answer, then it can implicitly mean "no".

**Thai people like to ask questions** and they often do it in a very direct way. How old are you? How much money do you earn? Don't mix this up with rudeness; it is just the way Thai people communicate. A standard phrase is *pai nai* or Where are you going? It is equivalent to just Hallo or How are you? The expression "I am heading upcountry" can mean anywhere outside Bangkok. Thai people don't like to be alone and are often confused by many foreigners' need for privacy.



**Be aware of your clothing** if you visit places down south where many people are Muslims. They are usually more conservative, especially if you are a woman. Try to cover up a little more in these areas. Even tribal people up north may take offence at tight and "revealing" clothes. Thin loose clothing is not only "decent", it is also comfortable in a hot climate and a good protection against mosquitoes. Always take your shoes off when entering a temple, mosque or a private home. Not doing so is considered rude to the extreme.

**Cleanliness** is important in Thailand. Even poor people wash themselves daily and have clean clothes. A person who falls short regarding cleanliness loses respect.