

## THAILAND

The Kingdom of Thailand is a country in Southeast Asia. To its east lie Laos and Cambodia; to its south, the Gulf of Thailand and Malaysia; and to its west, the Andaman Sea and Myanmar. Its capital and largest city is Bangkok. The country's official name was Siam. At 198,000 sq mi, Thailand is the world's 49th-largest country. It is comparable in size to France, and somewhat larger than California. The local climate is tropical and characterized by monsoons.

Ratchaphruek is the national flower. It bears beautiful cluster-shaped flowers in summer. The color of flowers is shining yellow, similar to the color of national religion 'Buddhism' and the color of Monday when the Majesty King of Thailand was born.



Thai elephant is selected as national animal because it has maintained close link with Thai history and custom, it has a long life, and it is closely related to the livelihood of Thai people as one of transportation means both in times of peace and battles. According to ancient royal Thai traditions, a white elephant is a noble beast of special importance, exemplifying a king's honor and glory. A white elephant is a gift fit for a king and to acquire one during his reign, will bring about prosperity and happiness throughout the kingdom.

95% of Thais are Buddhists of the Theravada tradition. Muslims are the second largest religious group in Thailand at 4.6%. The Thai language is Thailand's national language, written in its own alphabet.

Thai cuisine blends five fundamental tastes: sweet, spicy, sour, bitter and salty. Some common ingredients used in Thai cuisine include garlic, chillies, lime juice, lemon grass, and fish sauce. The staple food in Thailand is rice, particularly jasmine variety rice which is included in almost every meal. Thailand is the world's largest exporter of rice, and Thais domestically consume over 100 kg of milled rice per person per year.