Thailand

Location

Thailand is located in South Asia and has an area of approximately 514,000 square kilometers. It is roughly 470 miles from east to west, and 1,050 miles from the northern most point to the southern most point. Four countries border Thailand: Laos to the Northeast, Cambodia to the Southeast, Burma to the West, and Malaysia to the immediate South. The nearest bodies of water are the Gulf of Thailand, the Andaman Sea, and the Strait of Malacca.

Geography

Thailand’s most dominant feature include the central plain which is dominated by the Mae Nam (river), Chao Phraya, and its tributaries. The northeast rises a dry Khorat Plateau bordered on the east by the Mekong River. Along with Burma, Thailand is bordered by mountains along the northern and western borders, and extends south into narrow, largely rain-forested Malay Peninsula. Emptying into the Gulf of Thailand is a network of rivers and canals associated with northern mountains and central plains through the Chao Phraya River. Mae Nam Mun and other northeastern streams drain via Mekong into South China Sea. These various forms of topography and drainage define the four regions of Thailand: North, Northeast, Center, and South.

Climate

The Thai climate can be described as a tropical monsoon climate. Southwest monsoons arrive between May and July and signal the start of a rainy season that lasts until October. This cycle reverses with northeast monsoon in November and December, ushering in a dry season. During the months March through May, cooler temperatures give way to extremely hot dry
weather. And in general, rainfall is heaviest in the south, and lightest in the northeast.

Understanding the seasonal variations, however, can help in planning a visit. November to October is the season the most favored by tourists. Although the weather during this time is still quite hot, it is not nearly as humid. In the north, the temperature in the evening can drop as much as ten degrees, making it a comfortable climate.

History

Thailand was founded in the thirteenth century. Until 1939, the Kingdom of Thailand was known as Siam. Once referred to as Siamese, the people of Thailand are now referred to as “Thai” which means “free” making Thailand “the land of the free”. Tai-speaking people living south of the Chang Jiang (in the mountainous plateau of what is now the Chinese province of Yunnan) are the forebears of the modern Thai. Early Chinese records document the Tai cultivating wetland rice in valleys and lowland areas.

The northern Thai kingdoms grew in size and numbers, spurred by the Mongol conquest of China. Sukhothai rose to preeminence under King Ramkhamhaeng, who is thought to have invented the Thai writing system and who also ed the basis of the Thai nation. The Fourteenth Century was known as the Ayutthaya period and lasted for over 400 years. During this time, the organization of government and strong tradition of art and literature were firmly established. The Portuguese, who were known as influential traders, introduced firearm technology.

Population
Over sixty-six million people populate the country of Thailand, with a 1.9- percent annual growth. With an estimated population at over six million, the capital Bangkok is largest city, the next ten cities ranging from 80,000 to 110,000 in population. Overall density is roughly 100.5 persons per square kilometer.

**Currency**

The Thai official currency is called the *baht*. Presently the baht to dollar ratio is 43:1, or there are 43 baht in one American dollar. This changes almost daily. Thai money is very unique in the sense that it ranges from one-quarter to one-half baht coins to one thousand baht notes. The coins range in color from a gold-copper color to silver, with a few being two-toned. The coins can be found in 0.25, 0.5, 1, 5, and 10 baht. The paper currency has some of the same denominations in addition to the 20, 50, 100, 500, and 1000 baht notes. Within the past few years, Thailand has incorporated a plastic, indestructible material into their paper currency that is made in Australia. Currently it can only be found in the fifty-baht note. This material is impossible to tear and is very durable (one hint though, never leave this currency on your dashboard on a hot day, it will melt!).

**Landmarks**

There are many wonderful landmarks that could be described but three in particular that can be of most use to tourists are: first, the sapphire mines all over the southwestern coast of Thailand. Here, a tourist can visit a beautiful area where many gem stores line miles of mines. It is here where precious and semi-precious gems are purchased at a very discounted
rate. Bargaining with the dealers is as unique of an experience as mining for the gems personally.

Secondly, there is the Royal Palace (also known as the Grand Palace) in Bangkok. Here, hundreds of years worth of royalty have built shrines to themselves and their gods in the forms of large and majestic palaces. The palace compounds consists of several Thai-style buildings with highly decorative architectural details. And third, the Dusit Mahaprasat is the most prominent building, and is considered one of the most splendid examples of Thai-style architecture. Built in 1782 during the reign of King Rama I, the palace was placed in Bangkok to establish the capital of Siam. Now a museum, the Grand Palace is maintained by the Royal Household Bureau, and houses the Royal Thai Decorations, Coin Pavilion, and is also the home to the Weapon Museum.

Agriculture

Independent small-holders are accountable for the food surpluses. About sixty-nine percent of the labor force is engaged in this sector, and nearly eighty percent of the Thai population was dependent on agriculture in the mid-1980’s. Until the late 1950’s, the major emphasis in agriculture was on rice, and secondly, on rubber, which together accounted for over half the value of all commodity exports. Other crops grown regularly include maize, potatoes, cassava, beans, yams, sugarcane, cotton, fruit, and oilseeds. After the Bowring Treaty of 1855, Thai agriculture was strongly influenced by the West due to the Treaty’s diversification of crops. When world demand increased, higher prices and developing domestic industry arose during the 1960’s and 1970’s. Thailand’s independent small farmers responded by expanding substantially the output of many secondary crops.
Trade

Mixed economy includes both strong private sector and state enterprises. The Thai government assumes the responsibility for general infrastructure development. In most basic terms, Thailand is a capitalist country committed to free trade. A worldwide recession in the 1980's followed the rapid economic development of the 1960's and 70's. Bangkok metropolitan area faced problems of rapid modernization, including housing shortages and pressure on such basic services as sewage, water, and health care.

Tin, clothing, primary and processed agricultural products, along with a few other manufactured consumer goods, are Thailand's major exports. Major imports include capital goods, intermediate products, and raw materials such as petroleum products. Petroleum products make the single largest import by monetary value since the mid-1970's. The two largest trading partners with Thailand are Japan and the United States.

Thailand’s recovery from the oil shock of the 1970’s was delayed even further by a loss in export competitiveness, a slowdown in the economies of major trading partners, and a growing debt service obligation resulting in part from rising interest rates. Tourism has been a big money maker for Thailand, which contributed to a service balance surplus.

Language

A majority of the population speak the language of Thai (a member of Tai language family). Most prevalent are Thai-Lao, spoken in the Northeast, and Central Thai, which is the official language taught in schools and used in the government. Other languages spoken by the
minority groups include Chinese, Malay, Karen, and Khmer, although many of these groups will also speak a little Thai.

Thai is basically a tonal language. The written form was modeled after the Indian alphabet using Khmer characters. Some examples of Thai language are as follows:

Hello      Sawasdee krap (male)    Sawasdee ka (female)
How are you?  Sabai di ru?
I am fine.  Sabai di krap (male)    Sabai di ka (female)
How much does this cost?  Ni raka taw rai?

Food

When discussing Thai food, we may classify it into two categories, savory and dessert. Thai savory consists of five basic tastes: bland, salty, sweet, sour, and spicy hot. Even further, savory is broken down into six groups: gaeng (soup), fried food, yam (equivalent to our salad), deep fried-roasted dishes, dips, and accompanying dishes (snacks). Desserts, on the other hand, come in both liquid and solid form. Most of them are prepared from coconut milk, sugar, and flour such as Kley Buad Chee (banana in sweetened coconut milk), Kanom Piak Poon (black custard), or Kanom Sai Sai (dumpling with filling wrapped in banana leaves and steamed).

Rich in a large variety of fruit, Thailand is famous for fruit yam and processed, pickled, or dried fruits. Traditional Thai desserts are often treated with aroma and given form by carving or molding to make them more appealing to the eye.
**Kimberley Allen**

**Thailand (Siam)**

**Location**

Thailand is a small country that is nested in between Cambodia and Burma. To the south lies the Gulf of Thailand. Thailand was Established in the mid-1400’s. It was formerly known as Siam until 1939, and is the only Asian country that was never taken over by a European power. Following an alliance with Japan during WW II, Thailand became a United States Ally.

**Population**

The population of Thailand is 61,230,874. The birth rate is 16.86 births for every 1,000 persons. The death rate is 7.53 deaths for every 1000 persons. All in all this leads to a population growth of 0.93% annually. The life expectancy for males is 65.29 years and for females it is 71.97 years.

**Religion**

Religion is a very important aspect of Thai living and most of them practice Theravada Buddhism. Other ethnic groups within the population include Chinese, Malays, and indigenous hill peoples, such as the Hmong and Karen.

**Agriculture**

Traditionally based on agriculture, Thailand's economy began developing rapidly in the 1980s. Agriculture (crop cultivation, livestock, fishery, and forestry) has long been
an important part of the Thai economy. Of the total land area of 51 million hectares, 21.6 million hectares are used for agricultural purposes.

Today produced products account for a major portion of Thailand's foreign exchange earnings. Agricultural products are produced in such quantities that Thailand has become a major supplier in many products worldwide.

During the past ten years, agricultural growth has been quite impressive -- an average rate of four percent a year. This is largely due to the expansion of cultivated land. The government also has stepped in and created policies that stimulate agricultural production and change.

The four most important foods crops in terms of the planted area and the value of production are rice, maize, sugarcane, and cassava. The first three are important domestic food commodities as well as foreign currency earners, while the fourth is predominantly an export crop. Other major crops produced are mungbean and soybean in the northern region, and kenaf in the northeastern region. Mungbean and soybean account for nearly 0.50 hectares and 0.23 million hectares of the total cultivated land, respectively. Other agricultural crops are grown in the southern region, where the most important crop is rubber. At present, Thailand is becoming a major producer of tropical fruits (e.g., pineapple and longan) and horticultural crops (e.g., orchids) for export.

Thailand is among the world's top ten fishing nations in terms of total catch and exports. Two major export earners are squid and cuttlefish. The country is also one of the world's largest producers of frozen shrimp. Agriculture which includes fish and
shrimp farming and breeding is being vigorously promoted by the government to serve rapidly expanding domestic and overseas markets.

Field crops, which accounted for 50 percent of agricultural output in 1993, increased at an annual average rate of 8 percent between 1961 and 1993. Agricultural production was still dominated by seven major crops: rice, tapioca, rubber, maize, sugar-cane, mung beans and tobacco leaves, most of which were grown primarily for export.

Since 1970, the increase in crop production has come from both the expansion of cultivated areas and improvements in yields. In response to high agricultural prices, the total area planted has continued to increase. Farmers are also switching from crops with relatively low returns per land unit to those with considerable higher earnings. Performance does vary though; sugar cane, rubber and tapioca yields have been increasing significantly, rice and maize yields are growing slowly, and the kenaf yield is declining. The trend towards crop diversification continues in response to price incentives as the proportion of cropped area devoted to rice declines.

Livestock production is second in importance in the agricultural sector. Between 1988 and 1993, its share of the total GDP of agriculture declined from 1.7 percent to 1.3 percent.

The Government has also been trying to improve both dairy and beef herds through artificial insemination and by purchasing semen from high quality bulls from around the world.

Likewise, indigenous breeds of swine have been improved through crossbreeding with pure-breeds imported from abroad. The Livestock Department has
developed swine breeding centers to study and conduct experiments with artificial insemination.

Of all livestock raised for the market, poultry has improved the most. Chickens of pure descent are popular among poultry raisers and research is being conducted with the breeding and management of them with the aim of improving egg production. The feed conversion rate has been experimented with and has shown very promising results. As a result, one of the most important exports for this country is frozen chicken.

Tacy Albright