



Global Health Fellows

NORTHERN PACIFIC GLOBAL HEALTH RESEARCH
FELLOWS TRAINING CONSORTIUM

Thailand Handbook

Global Health Fellows Program

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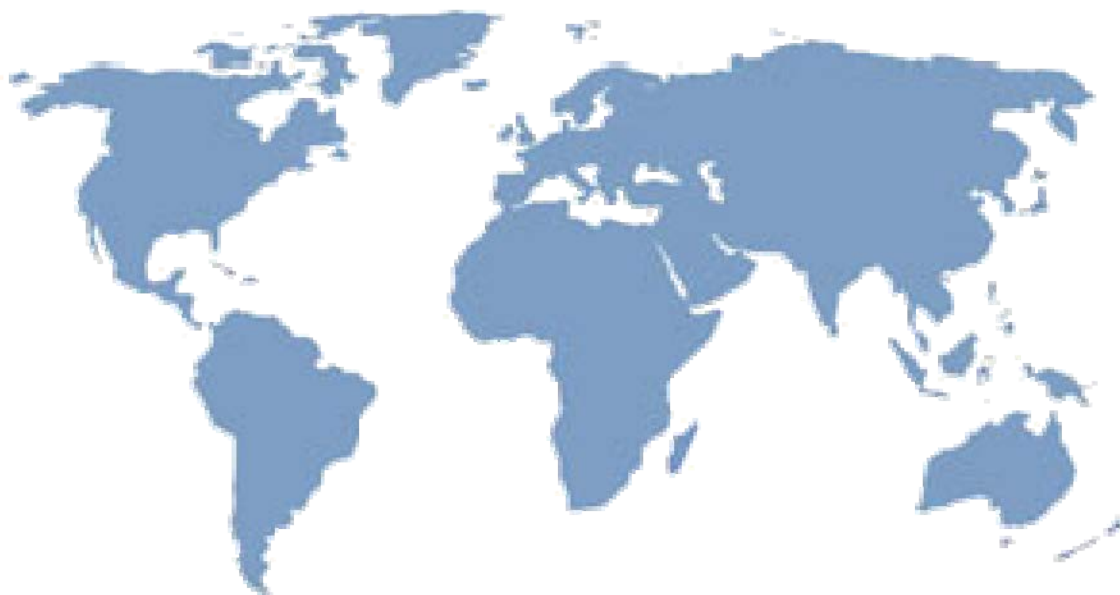


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NPGH CONSORTIUM IN THAILAND



Consortium Universities

-University of Hawaii -University of Minnesota -University of Washington

Partner Institutions

- University of Hawaii-Southeast Asia Research Collaboration with Hawaii (SEARCH)
- Armed Forces Research Institute of the Medical Sciences (AFRIMS)
- Mahidol University
- Chulalongorn University
- Thammasat University
- Khon Kaen University

University of Hawaii-Southeast Asia Research Collaboration with Hawaii (SEARCH):

Established in 2003, SEARCH is a collaborative HIV clinical and translational research and training facility located in Bangkok, as a partnership between the University of Hawaii (UH) Hawaii Center for AIDS (HICFA), the Thai Red Cross AIDS Research Centre, and the Department of Retrovirology, U.S. Department of Defense.

Armed Forces Research Institute of the Medical Sciences (U.S. AFRIMS): SEARCH serves as an HIV/AIDS training center for physicians and other ancillary personnel in Southeast Asia and has substantial expertise in HIV clinical research. AFRIMS is a leading tropical infectious disease laboratory in Southeast Asia with programs in enteric diseases, an entomology department dedicated to the study of malaria and other vector-borne diseases, and programs in viral diseases including dengue fever, hepatitis, and HIV/AIDS. The retrovirology department of AFRIMS specializes in vaccine studies for HIV and was the center responsible for the NIH-sponsored phase III HIV vaccine trial evaluating the “prime-boost” strategy using ALVAC-HIV (vCP1521) and AIDSVAX B/E in 16,000 young Thai HIV seronegative adults. These partners provide a solid foundation for HIV clinical/translational research. SEARCH is directed by Dr. Jintanat Ananworanich, a U.S.-trained pediatric immunologist and an accomplished HIV clinical investigator with substantial expertise in leading adult and pediatric HIV clinical trials. She holds an appointment as Associate Professor of Medicine at the John A. Burns School of Medicine, UH.

Chulalongkorn University (CU): CU is Thailand's first institution of higher learning, officially founded in March 1917. Located in Bangkok, CU is composed of 41 faculties; departments; colleges; academic, research, and service institutes; and academic offices. There are 22,455 undergraduate students, 10,746 Master's degree students, and 2,394 PhD degree students. UMN research studies in Thailand include a study on the effects of anti-retroviral therapy on pulmonary function (Kunisaki, PI; NHLBI; multiple sites, including Chulalongkorn) and a study on the epidemiology of influenza (Osterholm, PI; NIAID; Chulalongkorn). UMN's education work in Thailand include USAID-funded training grants to improve response to pandemic threats in zoonotic diseases, to build capacity in disease surveillance and detection, and to pilot a pioneering veterinary public health residency program based on the very successful VPH residency at UMN. UMN researchers also conduct NIH-funded studies of pulmonary and cardiovascular complications of HIV with Khon Kaen University and CU.

Thammasat University (TU): TU was established in 1934 and is the second oldest university in Thailand. TU offers 245 degree programs, including 99 Master's programs and 34 Ph.D. programs—24 of which are in the health sciences. There are 1,752 faculty members, 6,516 students currently enrolled in Master's programs, and 327 students currently enrolled in Ph.D. programs. The UW School of Dentistry has a long-standing history of collaboration with several dental schools in Thailand, but most prominently with Khon Kaen and Thammasat Universities. Over the past 10 years, approximately 150 Thai dental faculty have participated in Fogarty-sponsored workshops, approximately 25 have been supported to attend the Summer Institute, and five long-term trainees have completed or are currently engaged in Ph.D. training. What had previously been a predominantly one-way collaboration on research projects initiated by Thai faculty has recently been reciprocated with the initiation of a case/control study of orofacial clefts in Thailand led by Dr. Christy McKinney, a former postdoctoral trainee on the UW T32 training grant "Comprehensive Training in Interdisciplinary Oral Health Research," and a current KL2 trainee on the UW's CTSA award.

Khon Kaen University (KKU): KKU was established in 1964 and has more than 2,110 staff in 17 faculties; four academic support centers; two academic services centers; a hospital; and many research institutes, centers of excellence, and specialist centers. The Faculty of Dentistry at KKU is the only national dental school located in Northeastern Thailand and has provided leadership in dental education, research, and patient care in the region. The KKU Dental Hospital offers comprehensive and first-rate oral health care to more than 80,000 patients a year, including adults, children and disadvantaged patients.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW



Health Statistics

Total population: 67,764,000

Gross national income per capita (PPP international \$): 7,770

Life expectancy at birth m/f (years): 66/74

Probability of dying under five (per 1 000 live births): 14

Probability of dying between 15 and 60 years m/f (per 1,000 population): 270/139

Total expenditure on health per capita (Intl \$, 2009): 345

Total expenditure on health as % of GDP (2009): 4.3

Health & Healthcare

Thailand has had "a long and successful history of health development," according to the World Health Organization. Life expectancy is seventy years at birth, ninety-eight and ninety-six percent of the population have access to improved drinking water and sanitation (respectively), and a system providing universal health care for Thai nationals has been established since 2002. Health and medical care is overseen by the Ministry of Public Health, along with several other non-ministerial government agencies, with total national expenditure on health amounting to 4.3% of GDP in 2009. Although HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other infectious diseases remain serious public health issues, non-communicable diseases and injuries have also become important causes of morbidity and mortality.

The majority of health care services in Thailand are delivered by the public sector, which include 1,002 hospitals and 9,765 health stations. Universal health care is provided through three programs: the civil service welfare system for civil servants and their families, Social Security for private employees, and the Universal Coverage scheme theoretically available to all other Thai nationals. Some private hospitals are participants in these programs, though most are financed by patient self-payment and private insurance.

The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) oversees national health policy and also operates most government health facilities. The National Health Security Office (NHSO) allocates funding through the Universal Coverage program. Other health-related government agencies include the Health System Research Institute (HSRI), Thai Health Promotion Foundation ("ThaiHealth"), National Health Commission Office (NHCO), and the Emergency Medical Institute of Thailand (EMIT). Although there have been national policies for decentralization, there has been resistance in implementing such changes and the MOPH still directly controls most aspects of health care.

Thailand introduced universal coverage reforms in 2001, becoming one of only a handful of lower-middle income countries to do so. Means-tested health care for low income households was replaced by a new and more comprehensive insurance scheme, originally known as the 30 baht project, in line with the small co-payment charged for treatment. People joining the scheme receive a gold card which allows them to access

services in their health district, and, if necessary, be referred for specialist treatment elsewhere. The bulk of finance comes from public revenues, with funding allocated to Contracting Units for Primary Care annually on a population basis. According to the WHO, 65% of Thailand's health care expenditure in 2004 came from the government, while 35% was from private sources. Although the reforms have received a good deal of criticism, they have proved popular with poorer Thais, especially in rural areas, and survived the change of government after the 2006 military coup. Then Public Health Minister, Mongkol Na Songkhla, abolished the 30 baht co-payment and made the UC scheme free. It is not yet clear whether the scheme will be modified further under the coalition government that came to power in January 2008.

Most hospitals in Thailand are operated by the MOPH. Private hospitals are regulated by the Medical Registration Division under the MOPH's Department of Health Service Support following the Sanatorium Act, B.E. 2541. Other government units and public organizations also operate hospitals, including the military, universities, local governments and the Red Cross. As of 2010, there are 1,002 public hospitals and 316 registered private hospitals.

Provincial hospitals operated by the MOPH's Office of the Permanent Secretary are classified as follows:

- Regional hospitals are located in province centers, have a capacity of at least 500 beds and have a comprehensive set of specialists on staff.
- General hospitals are located in province capitals or major districts and have a capacity of 200 to 500 beds.
- Community hospitals are located in the district level and further classified by size:
 - Large community hospitals have a capacity of 90 to 150 beds.
 - Medium community hospitals have a capacity of 60 beds.
 - Small community hospitals have a capacity of 10 to 30 beds.

While all three types of hospitals serve the local population, community hospitals are usually limited to providing primary care, while referring patients in need of more advanced or specialized care to general or regional hospitals. The term general hospital, when referring to private hospitals, refers to hospitals which provide non-specialized care. Private hospitals with fewer than 30 beds are officially termed health centers. Both are defined as accepting patient admissions.

Although infectious diseases, most notably HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, remain serious public health issues, non-communicable diseases and injuries have also become important causes of morbidity and mortality. Major infectious diseases in Thailand also include bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis, dengue fever, malaria, Japanese encephalitis, rabies, and leptospirosis.

HIV/AIDS is a serious problem in Thailand. The United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) reported in November 2004 that the Thai government had launched a well-funded, politically supported, and pragmatic response to the epidemic. As a result, national adult HIV prevalence has decreased to an estimated 1.5% of all persons aged 15-49 years (or about 1.8% of the total population). It was also reported that 58,000 adults and children had died from AIDS since the first case was reported in 1984. The government has begun to improve its support to persons with HIV/AIDS and has provided funds to HIV/AIDS support groups. Public programs have begun to alter unsafe behavior, but discrimination against those infected continues. The government has funded an antiretroviral drug program and, as of September 2006, more than 80,000 HIV/AIDS patients had received such drugs

PREPARING FOR YOUR TRIP

Financial

Please notify your credit card and banking institutions that you will be abroad for 11 months to prevent problems accessing funds while you are abroad.

Entry/Exit Requirements

Visas & Work Permits

U.S. citizens should apply for a one-year non-immigrant multi-entry visa through the Thai embassy prior to departure. Trainees in the past have gotten different classifications, including “RS” for research, “B” for business, and “O” for other. While this visa will allow you to enter and exit Thailand for a year, the stamp at Customs and Immigrations is only good for 90 days, so you will need to leave the country every three months to renew your stamp, or fines accrue daily. If you don’t have the time to take a longer vacation, a bus run to the border and back only takes a day:

<http://bangkokbuddy.com/thai-visa-run/>

Upon entry, you may be asked to show proof of a Yellow Fever vaccine.

For more information, please visit the website for the Thai Embassy in the U.S.:

http://www.thaiembassydc.org/?page_id=284

Vaccines and Travel-related Health Concerns

Check the CDC’s web page for up-to-date information on recommended vaccines for traveling to Thailand: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/thailand>

Notes on Malaria, Dengue Fever, and other Outbreaks in Thailand

- Mosquito-borne illnesses in Thailand include Malaria, Japanese Encephalitis and Dengue Fever. Thailand has both day- (*Aedes Aegypti*, which carries the Dengue Fever virus) and night- (*Plasmodium* species) biting mosquitoes. The best prevention for all of these is to wear light, long clothes and socks or to use mosquito repellents (such as DEET) on bare skin, especially at night or when near rivers, lakes or the coast. Use bed nets if necessary. Do not allow water to collect around your home, as stagnant water (water storage jars, flowerpots etc) is a favorite breeding ground of mosquitoes. Spraying of certain parts of Bangkok to reduce mosquito populations is done, particularly during the rainy season.
- Malaria is rare in Bangkok, but more common in the country side, so you may need to consider taking preventive antimalarials if travelling to certain areas. Consult your doctor about these, as the recommended drugs change frequently.
- Dengue fever is becoming more of a concern in Thailand and there have been outbreaks in Bangkok. The number of cases has grown in the last 20 years, and tends to peak in June and July. Since it is carried by a day-time biting mosquito, it

is important to take preventive measures, particularly in the early morning or late evening.

- The symptoms of Dengue Fever vary from mild to severe and include fever, headache, muscle and joint pains, rash, nausea and vomiting. There is no vaccine to prevent Dengue Fever and no specific treatment once infected. Avoid aspirin as this may increase the risk of bleeding. Medical attention should be sought if you suspect infection. Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever (sometimes associated with bleeding into the skin) may require hospital admission.
- Running around in bare feet is not advised. Apart from the obvious risks of foot injuries, there are still some risks such as Leptospirosis (from rat urine) and, in rural areas, parasites such as hookworms.
- If you have walked through flood water you should thoroughly wash all feet and skin that has had direct contact with water.

Other Documentation

Whenever traveling, it is important for you to be prepared in case your passport and other important documents are lost or stolen. Therefore, we recommend that all travelers have a Xerox copy of their important documents as well as an electronic copy. You may also email or mail a copy of these documents to the Support Center (hobbsn@uw.edu) for safe keeping in your personnel file.

Traveler Security Registration & Emergency Contacts

Emergency Contacts

All trainees should provide emergency contact information to the Support Center at the start of their training experience. This information will be kept private but is important to have on file in case of an emergency that requires our assistance.

Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)

Sign up for the State Department's free Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (formerly known as "Travel Registration" or "Registration with Embassies") to receive the latest travel updates and information. When you sign up, you will automatically receive the most current information they compile about the country where you will be traveling or living. You will also receive updates, including Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts (where appropriate). Register on the STEP website:

http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/registration/registration_4789.html.

Packing for your Trip

Clothing

- T-shirts, shorts, skirts, underwear: clothing is easily purchased in Thailand but bigger sizes may be harder to find. Bring a decent pair of shorts with sturdy pockets that are useful for storing documents.
- Note: try to purchase pure cotton clothing whenever possible because it will help you stay cooler in the Thai heat
- Bring a long sleeve top and long pants for night time hours and for work to prevent mosquitos from biting you when it gets colder at night
- Comfortable shoes! You'll be walking a lot in Thailand and you'll want a decent pair of athletic shoes and a comfortable pair of sandals. Avoid buying anything too expensive because they will often be covered in mud!

General Supplies

- First aid kit
- Surge protector—plug your electronics into a surge protector whenever possible to keep power fluctuations from destroying them!
- Phone charger and converter. The power outlets in Thailand are 220V but the plug-in to the wall is a different design than in the U.S.
- Small backpack for your travels
- Toiletries are available in country, but if you are attached to a particular brand you may want to bring your own.
- Sanitary napkins are available in Thailand, and tampons can also be found. However, the quality of the products may be different than what you would
- Extra 1x1" photos of yourself come in handy for visa renewal and memberships.

Medications

- You should plan to bring the medications that you take daily since the quality of medications abroad may not be the same as in the U.S.
- Keep medications in the original prescription bottles and always place them in your carry-on luggage
- Note: some medications that are prescriptions in the U.S. are illegal in other countries. You should check the U.S. Department of State Consular Sheets for Thailand to determine if your medication is allowable. If your medication is not allowed in the country you will be visiting, ask your health-care provider to write a letter on office stationery stating the medication has been prescribed for you.
- Bring anti-malarial drugs, if traveling to a malaria-risk area in Thailand and prescribed by your doctor
- Many doctors recommend bringing anti-diarrhea medication such as Immodium to prevent traveler's diarrhea
- Iodine tablets and portable water filters to purify water if bottled water is not available

- Sun block and mosquito repellent are available in Thailand, although they can be expensive and the quality may be lower than in the U.S.

To prevent insect/mosquito bites, bring:

- DEET or another form of mosquito repellent. These products are available at local REI or outdoor adventure stores.
- Bed nets treated with permethrin can be purchased within Thailand but are cheaper in the U.S. Since they transport easily, we recommend purchasing one prior to your departure.

Work Dress-Code

Although no dress code is required, professional or business casual dress is recommended. For those working in laboratories, all biosafety standards and precautions should be met including close-toed shoes and long pants.

IN-COUNTRY

Animals

- Stray dogs and cats are everywhere. Rabies is widespread and every year people die of rabies in Thailand. Avoid touching stray animals. Vaccinations for rabies are available at hospitals.
- Many people live in Bangkok without ever seeing a snake, but they are common in some Moobaans (compounds with houses and gardens). Most are harmless, but some are venomous.

Communication

Internet

Internet cafés are easy to access around Bangkok and tourist spots all over the country. You'll generally be looking at rates of around 30-60 baht per hour in tourist-laden districts like Khao San Road, 20-30 baht per hour in downtown (the top floors of MBK-Shopping Center for example), and 10-15 baht per hour if you would venture into residential areas (where the speed generally is still high).

An increasing number of cafés and pubs offer free Wi-Fi to their customers. Many mobile phone operators offer paid Wi-Fi access. Most hotels and guest houses provide at least some form of Internet. Some have Wi-Fi access inside the rooms — but inquire before booking.

Phone

The country code of Thailand is 66 and the area code for Bangkok is 02. You only need to dial the 0 if you're calling from within Thailand. Pay phones are not commonplace, as most Thais have a mobile phone. You can bring your own mobile phone from the US and buy a local SIM card for ~49THB at Suvarnabhumi Airport (or other mobile phone stores throughout the city) and a pre-paid plan for ~427THB per month. Be sure to suspend or cancel service with your American provider before you come. The top three mobile networks are True, Dtac, and AIS, with AIS having the best English-speaking customer service. Topping up is easy; just walk into a 7-Eleven convenience store and pick an amount you want to add. Making international calls is also cheaper this way. The mobile app LINE is very popular for unlimited text messages, phone calls, and videochats over Wi-Fi or data networks.

Post

Bangkok's red post boxes are found all over the city. There are also plenty of Thailand Post Offices around for sending post and packages.

Health Care Facilities

Hospitals

Several international-standard hospitals in Bangkok have programs that cater to expats and visitors. They offer a full slate of services, including allergy, dental, eye and preventative medicine clinics. There are many private and government hospitals all in the Bangkok area. Most of the private hospitals have English-speaking staff to facilitate the visitors.

The hospitals generally expect payment in cash or by credit card at the time of service and will not bill your insurance company directly. Please check your insurance plan before arriving to see if the policy is applied when you are out of the U.S.

The major private hospitals in the city are:

- Bumrungrad (33 Sukhumvit Soi 3, www.bumrungrad.com, tel. 02 667 1555)
- Samitivej (133 Sukhumvit 49, www.samitivej.co.th/sukhumvit, tel. 02 711 8000)
- Bangkok Nursing Home (9/1 Convent Road, Silom, www.BNHhospital.com, tel. 02 686 2700)
- Bangkok General (2 Soi Soonvijai 7, New Petchaburi Road, www.bangkokhospital.com, tel. 02 310 3000 or 1719)

Pharmacy

Pharmacies are plentiful in the city, and in central areas. Most pharmacists will speak English. If you don't find what you need at the smaller pharmacies, try one of the hospitals, which stock a wider range of pharmaceuticals but also charge higher prices (and you'll need to see a doctor first). The hospital pharmacies are open 24 hours; smaller pharmacies usually open around 10am and close between 8pm-10pm.

Money

The baht (sign: ฿; code: THB) is the currency of Thailand. It is subdivided into 100 satang. The exchange rate varies but is approximately 1 USD = 32.48 THB.

With a fixed residential address you can apply to open a Thai bank account. Without a valid work permit, you may find reluctance at some Thai banks to allow your opening an account. Check whether someone at your sponsoring institution can assist you with this. For example, the Thai Red Cross has strong ties to Siam Commercial Bank (SCB), and an accountant at SEARCH secured a letter of endorsement and facilitated the account application process. Since trainees are not technically working and earning an income in Thailand, you may be allowed to open a savings account, but not a checking account, with a minimum balance of 500 THB.

Once money has been transferred to your Thai bank account, it's much easier to conduct financial transactions without incurring fees every time. SCB allows unlimited ATM transactions at its own machines in Bangkok and a limited number of transactions at other

banks' machines before charging a fee; transactions at SCB ATMs outside Bangkok may incur a fee, and the ATM card can also be used as a debit card. Thai banks also make it easier to pay utility bills and rent. You can sometimes transfer rent payment directly into a landlord's bank account via ATM (verified, 35 THB fee) or online (unverified). Common utility bills can be paid at the bank counter, online, or at the ATM by scanning the barcode on the bill for a nominal fee. Utility bills can also be paid at 7-Eleven for a nominal fee.

Keep in mind that Thailand, like many other Asian countries, operates a primarily cash economy. Outside of hotels, major retailers, and venues frequented by tourists, credit cards are not commonly accepted. And even if merchants do accept credit cards, they may pass the 1-3% fee that MasterCard or Visa charges them on to the consumer so that you'll end up paying more with a credit card than with cash. Also, your bank may levy an additional 1-3% foreign transaction fee.

Banks or legal moneychangers offer the optimum foreign-exchange rates. Major currencies such as US dollars, Euros, British pounds and Australian dollars can easily be exchanged at all banks. However, currency changing at banks might take significantly more time than the specialty exchange places. In tourist areas, you will often find small exchange counters. Current exchange rates are printed in the newspaper every day, or you can walk into any Thai bank and ask to see a daily rate sheet. Best exchange centers in Bangkok: [SuperRich Thai](#), [Grand Superrich](#), and [SuperRich 1965](#).

Standard banking hours are 8:30am to 3:30pm Monday to Friday, though some banks stay open until 4:30pm on Fridays, whereas, banking hours in shopping malls or department stores are 11:00am to 7:30pm. Small exchange counters are typically open from 8:30am to 8pm daily. ATMs are widely distributed in all major areas in Bangkok.

Getting money from the US to Thailand:

- Cash –US Customs allows transport of less than \$10,000 USD without filing a report. Ask your US bank for clean, untoned \$100 bills. When transporting cash, do not pack in checked luggage, do not store all in one place, and do not place in obvious/visible location. Since it may take some time to set up a Thai bank account and transfer funds by other means, you may want to carry enough cash to cover a few months' worth of living expenses, including 2-3 months' rent plus 2 months for security deposit.
- Wire transfer – Similar to cash transport, wire transfer amounts up to \$10,000 USD are not flagged. International wire transfer may take a few days to clear and incur high fees (\$40-\$75) on the US side as well as currency exchange loss and fees on the Thai side. Currency conversion is calculated using the TT buy rate. You may need to alert your US bank beforehand to use wire transfer, as they normally require you to be physically present at the US bank branch to initiate an outgoing international wire transfer; however, it can be done over the phone at the branch manager's discretion.

- US check deposit – Amounts up to \$10,000 USD are not flagged. Depositing a check from a US bank in a Thai bank account may still incur fees although less than wire transfer. However, deposit of a US check can take 30-45 days to clear. For one trainee, funds were withdrawn from her US account within a week but deposited in her Thai account exactly one month after initiating the transaction. Currency conversion was calculated using the TC buy rate, which is lower than the TT rate.
- ATM withdrawal – Thai banks charge 150-180 THB per withdrawal using a US bank card. Although US banks negotiate favorable currency exchange rates, they may also charge an additional ATM fee and foreign transaction fee (typically 1-3%). For example, withdrawal using the US Bank Per Diem Card at a Thai ATM will incur a 150-180 THB charge from the Thai bank plus a \$3 USD fee from US Bank plus a 3% foreign transaction fee from US Bank. Most Thai ATMs are set by default to dispense a maximum of 20 bills (20,000 THB) in a single transaction. Posters at Thaivisa.com forum suggest it may be possible to change this setting for your account.
- Bank counter withdrawal – If you take your US bank card to the counter inside the bank, most tellers will direct you to the ATM. If you insist, and the branch does allow counter withdrawal (with ID), you can bypass ATM fees and withdrawal limits. However, you may be getting a lower currency exchange rate than at the ATM.
- ACH transfer to Bangkok Bank in New York – Some US banks offer free domestic ACH transfer (e.g. online bill payment). You can request ACH transfer to Bangkok Bank in NY as an alternative to direct wire transfer (SWIFT). Bangkok Bank in NY charges a maximum \$20 fee in addition to 200-500 THB currency conversion fee on the Thai side. Transfers clear within a few days. Note: This method allows transfer of funds from your own US account to your own Bangkok Bank Thailand account but not to another person's Bangkok Bank Thailand account:
<http://www.bangkokbank.com/bangkokbank/personalbanking/dailybanking/transferringfunds/transferringintothailand/receivingfundsfromusa/pages/receivingfundsfromusa.aspx>

Housing

Hotels

Bangkok has a vast range of accommodations. The backpacker area is on a famous road known as Khao San Road. The riverside of Silom and Thonburi is for the Oriental and the Peninsula respectively, often ranked among the best in the world (and priced to match). Most of the city's moderate and expensive hotels can be found in Siam Square, Sukhumvit and Silom, though they also have budget hotels.

When choosing your accommodations, think of the amount of luxury you want to pay

for. Air-conditioning is advised, as temperatures don't drop below 68°F (20°C) at night. Also pay careful attention to Skytrain, metro, and express boat access, as a well-placed station or pier could make your stay in Bangkok much more comfortable.

In general, accommodation in Bangkok is cheap. It's possible to have a decent double room with hot shower and air-conditioning for about 500 Baht/night. If you want more luxury, expect to pay around 1,500 Baht for a double room in downtown. Even staying at one of Bangkok's top hotels only sets you back around 5,000 Baht.

SEARCH is located on Rajdumri Road which is in downtown. There are many hotels nearby such as Four Seasons, Courtyard by Marriott, Grande Center Point- Rajdumri and Lang Suan. These hotels are expensive; rates start at 3,000 Baht/night. However, SEARCH is close to BTS Rajdumri station and MRT Silom station, if you couldn't stay at the hotels nearby, hotels close to any BTS or MRT stations are also convenient for traveling to the SEARCH office. You may contact the SEARCH office before traveling, as they are willing to help find you suitable accommodations.

Apartments

During the rainy season, some areas of Bangkok will flood. Before renting a house, enquire about flooding from a neutral third party like potential neighbors. During heavy rains you may also experience power failures for short periods, which will consequently cut your water supply if you live in a house. Satellite signals may also be interrupted. Electrical wiring is sometimes very inventive. There are companies who can install a ground fault circuit breaker in your home. Contact "Safety Cut" at 02-756-880. Apartment blocks tend to have electric cookers and do not allow the use of gas for cooking. Check before you rent an apartment. For those in a house, gas can be delivered. Ask your neighbors or building management for a nearby service.

Useful Serviced Apartment Websites:

- www.moveandstay.com/Bangkok
- www.bangkok-apartment.com

While it is possible to find housing in Bangkok through websites, another good option is to walk around different neighborhoods, identifying and entering residential buildings, and looking for listings in the lobby or asking someone at the front desk if any units are available to rent. Sometimes the building staff already have permission or can quickly call the owner to show units immediately. Otherwise, you can schedule appointments with the owner or agent. Having a Thai mobile phone number makes this step easier. By law, property managers are obligated to offer not less than a one-year lease. Rental agents working on commission may be less willing to negotiate rental rate. A lease typically requires a security deposit equivalent to two months' rent. If you deal directly with the unit owner, you may find more flexibility in negotiating rental rate, security deposit, and length of lease. Regardless, it's wise to make sure that the person you deal with has authority to rent the property and will honor the written lease agreement before handing over money. Also make sure you get copies of receipts—especially for

utility bills.

Rental rates differ by neighborhood but also by age of building. Approximate rental rates near the Ratchadamri BTS station for a furnished, non-serviced apartment are:

Efficiency 15-20K THB per month

1 BD 18-25K THB per month

2 BD >35K THB per month

Furnished apartments in Salaya: 3-7K THB per month

Furnished apartments geared toward expats are more likely to have Western-style amenities. For example, as in other Asian countries, a shower in Thailand could consist of little more than a showerhead attached by hose to the faucet and a drain on the bathroom floor. Furnished expat apartments are more likely to include a bathtub or partitioned shower. Because Thai people typically eat out, many kitchens consist of little more than a refrigerator, a couple stovetop burners, a microwave, but no oven. Some buildings include a common laundry area or a commercial laundry service with only one or two machines for all tenants. Some apartments come with in-unit washers but not dryers as clothing can be hung out to dry, given the hot climate. Higher end housing and particularly serviced apartments are more likely to include appliances like combination washer/dryers, ovens, dishwashers. Serviced apartments may also come with housekeeping services, kitchenware, linens, and utilities included.

Note: If renting a nonserviced, furnished apartment, expect to spend a few hundred dollars for kitchenware, linens, and other basic items for initial household setup.

The safety of Bangkok tap water is still hotly debated. Authorities insist water is processed to international standards, and many expats state that they simply filter tap water from the faucet (e.g. Brita) to drink. Others argue that it depends on the condition of pipes running to and within your building. Ask your building manager or property owner whether water undergoes additional filtration/treatment in your building or unit before flowing to your faucet. If your tap water is not potable, bottled water can be bought cheaply at locations throughout the city.

Food



Lunch from the street: Ka prow pork and omelet on rice, grilled corn on the cob, lychee soda (~\$2 USD)

Lunch from CP Center: Stir-fried pork on rice, bubble tea (<\$3 USD)

Seaside restaurant near Samut Songkhram: Prawns

Food is cheap and plentiful in Bangkok. Walk outside, and you'll find street vendors selling meat on a stick, fried chicken, juice, tea/coffee, fruit, soup, snacks, desserts, etc. Go to the mall, and you'll find standalone restaurants as well as sprawling food courts with individual counters for various Asian and other cuisines. Many of these food courts have centralized registers where you get a card to be swiped at each counter where you order food and pay the total when leaving. CP Center at Chulalongkorn University uses a debit system in which you pay to put money on the card first and are returned the balance at the end.

If you do as the Thai people do, food and drink is very cheap. Of course, US chains are present in Bangkok (Starbucks, Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, McDonald's, Burger King, KFC, Pizza Hut, Subway), but you'll pay about the same as in the US. You can also find Bon Chon Korean fried chicken and Mos Burger from Japan as well as Chinese, Vietnamese, Italian, French, Indian, Middle Eastern, and other cuisines from around the world. Although not especially expensive by US standards, meals at restaurants in hotels and in tourist/expat areas cost quite a bit more than the typical meal in Thailand.

Many apartments do not allow cooking or appliances larger than hotplates, though some have communal kitchens, so you are likely to eat out a lot. Street food is recommended for being cheap and delicious at ~300baht/day for all meals. Satay (beef or pork grill with Satay sauce) costs about 5-10 Baht a piece.

Thai dishes can roughly be categorized into central, northern, northeastern and southern cuisine. Isaan food (from the northeast of Thailand) is a foreigners' favorite; generally street restaurants serve on plenty of small plates that can be shared. Som tam is a salad made from shredded and pounded raw papaya —spicy, but delicious. If you want to dine the Isaan way, also order some khao niew (sticky rice), kai yang (grilled

chicken) and moo yang (grilled pork). Isaan food is very spicy; say mai pet or pet nit noy to tone it down.

Local and regional beer can be found at bars, restaurants (even sidewalk restaurants), grocery stores, and convenience stores. Chang, Singha, Leo, and Tiger are common brands as are Heineken and Asahi. At retail 25-40 THB per bottle or can, prices are roughly on par with the US. Incidentally, beer companies like Chang and Singha also bottle water sold at retail locations as do Crystal, Nestle, and Coca-Cola. Bottles of wine can be found at grocery stores, some convenience stores, and specialty wine shops at roughly double the price compared to the US.

Food Safety

We want you to enjoy the delicious Thai cuisine, but please remember these guidelines from the CDC:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially before eating. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand gel (with at least 60% alcohol).
- Drink only bottled or boiled water, or carbonated drinks in cans or bottles. Avoid tap water and fountain drinks.
- Avoid ice from white, burlap rice sacks (ice in clear, plastic bags from the store is thought to be clean).
- Avoid dairy products, unless you know they have been pasteurized.
- Wash fruit and vegetables well. Consider soaking in a pesticide removing detergent.
- If eating from a roadside stall, make sure the food is freshly cooked in front of you and hasn't been left sitting out.
- Hepatitis A and typhoid immunizations are recommended to reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses: hepatitis A immunization is nearly 100% effective, but typhoid immunization is only 50-80% effective, with effective oral, live typhoid vaccination lasting longer than an inactivated typhoid shot.

Transportation & Traveling

Airport Rail Link

[Airport Rail Link](#) is the best way to get to the centre of Bangkok from Suvarnabhumi Airport. A ride takes less than 30 minute and costs at most 45 THB. Trains run every 15 minutes from 06:00-00:00.

By boat

Boats are a great way to get around the famous riverside area with its many historical attractions, and to explore the 'klongs' (canals) for a glimpse of yesteryear Bangkok. Several kinds of boats (express boats, river taxis and tail-boats) run up and down the Chao Phraya River, connecting with the local suburbs on the Thonburi side and along the river, while ferries can be used to cross the river at various points.

There are different types of boats offering different services, and some of the express boats only stop at the main piers. If you simply want to cross the river, there are ferries available at several boat landings. River taxis operate up and down the river and the cost varies with the length of the journey.

By taxi

Metered taxis are a quick and comfortable way to get around town, at least if the traffic is flowing your way, but be warned that Bangkok taxi drivers are notorious for finding ways to run up the fare; insist that the meter is used, and if the driver claims that your destination is closed, that he doesn't know where it is, or if he tries to take you elsewhere, just get out of the taxi.

All taxis are now metered and air-conditioned: the hailing fee is 35 baht. There are no surcharges (except from the airport), even at night; don't believe drivers who try to tell you otherwise. A red sign on the front window, if lit, means that the taxi is available.

When the meter is switched on you will see a red '35' somewhere on the dashboard or between the driver and you. Be sure to check for this at the start of the ride, as many drivers will "forget" to start the meter in order to overcharge you at the end of your trip. Most will start the meter when asked politely to do so (*meter na khrap* if you're male and *meter na kha* if you're female); if the driver refuses to use the meter after a couple of attempts, simply exit the taxi.

Your best bet is to walk to the road and catch an unoccupied metered taxi in motion (easier than it sounds, as Bangkok traffic tends to crawl the majority of the time, and one car out of four is a taxi). Avoid parked taxis altogether, and if a taxi driver refuses to turn the meter on, simply close the door and find one who will. Keep in mind that it is illegal for them to have unmetered fares.

Be sure to either know the correct pronunciation of your destination, or have it written in Thai, as taxi drivers in Bangkok are notoriously bad at reading maps, and most drivers speak limited English. Most hotels and guest houses will happily write out addresses in Thai for you. While most drivers will recognize the names of tourist hot spots, even if grossly mispronounced, it is often difficult to properly pronounce addresses in Thai. If your mobile phone works in Thailand, it is sometimes useful to call your hotel and ask the staff to speak to your driver in Thai. In addition, try to get your hotel's business card to show the taxi driver in case you get lost.

On some routes, the driver will ask if he should use the *tollway* — this will usually save a lot of time. You have to pay the cost at the toll booth (not in advance and not at the end of the journey). Watch how much the driver really pays, as many try to keep the change.

When getting out, try to have small bills (100 baht or less) or expect problems with change. Tips are not necessary, but are certainly welcome if you're happy about the service; most local passengers will round up or leave any coin change as tip.

By bus

Local buses, operated by the Bangkok Mass Transit Authority (BMTA) are the cheapest but also the most challenging way of getting around. There is a bewildering plethora of routes, usually marked only in Thai. Even Thais have a hard time with these, but at least they can call the 184 Bus Route Hotline, which is in Thai only. Bus stops list only the bus numbers that stop there and nothing more. They are also subject to Bangkok's notorious traffic, often terribly crowded, and many are not air-conditioned. If you want to get somewhere quickly and are not prepared to get lost, the buses should be avoided (remember that taxis are cheaper than most local buses in the West).

However, they make for a good adventure if you're not in a rush and you don't mind being the centre of attention.

By car

Bangkok is notorious for its massive traffic jams, and rightly so. In addition, traffic is chaotic and motorcyclists seemingly suicidal. Therefore, most tourists consider driving in Bangkok a nightmare, and it is highly recommended that you stick to public transport and not try to drive yourself around.

Metro

The [Metropolitan Rapid Transit](#) (MRT) consists of a single subway line.

Metro tickets are not interchangeable with Skytrain tickets. Rides cost between 16-42 baht and are based on distance; pre-paid cards of up to 1,000 baht are also available. For single ride fares, a round plastic token is used. It is electronic: simply wave it by the scanner to enter; then deposit it in a slot by the exit gate.

Note that bag-checks take place at the entrance of each station. It is usually nothing more than a quick peek inside, unless you are looking particularly suspicious.

Skytrain

The [BTS Skytrain](#) covers most of downtown and is especially convenient for visiting Siam Square. You must have 5 or 10 baht coins to purchase Skytrain tickets from vending machines. At most stations there is a single touch-screen machine that will accept 20, 50 and 100 baht notes, but there is often a queue to use it. Fares range from 14 to 52 baht depending upon how many zones you are travelling. Consult the map (in English) near each ticket machine. If you do not have coins, queue for change from the staff at the booth.

Tuk-tuk

Tuk-Tuks are not recommended as a way of quick transportation because taxis are more convenient. If you still want to try the tuk-tuk, always hail a moving tuk-tuk from the main road. At tourist spots, these tuk-tuk drivers lie in waiting to disrupt your travel plans. Always agree on a price before entering the tuk-tuk. Also be crystal clear about your intended destination. If they claim that your intended destination is closed for the day, and offer to take you to other nearby tourist spots, insist on your destination or get out.

Motorcycle taxis

Motorcycle taxis (essentially mopeds) can be found along major thoroughfares and near public transit stations. Their drivers can be spotted wearing numbered vests (mainly orange or pink). They are the ground transportation mode of choice for many Thais and expats alike. For 10 or 20 THB, you can hop on the back for a short trip down the street. Given their greater maneuverability, motorcycle taxi drivers may not always obey traffic rules (e.g. running stop lights, taking unusual turns, driving the opposite direction of vehicle traffic).

Traveling outside of Bangkok

Options to visit other cities include private car (taxi), public bus, minivan, or train. The train is by far the slowest way to travel, but is fairly cheap and could be enjoyable. For longer distances, Air Asia, Lion Air, Nok Air offer domestic flights.

Local Customs

Learn some basic Thai. It's true that one can survive without speaking a word of Thai in Bangkok, other major cities and tourist resorts. Yet you will find that speaking some of the language will ease and enrich your time here.

Thais are generally very polite, helpful people who almost always aim to please. Because of this, you might notice that often you will not be told "no" directly and much time can be spent while you work something out for yourself. Don't get cross. Remember, Thai people admire restraint, dislike raised voices and any other display of displeasure:

- Take it easy, don't get flustered, especially in the early days
- Speak gently; don't raise your voice
- Don't touch hair and heads of adults or children. It's considered impolite.
- Smile. Thais do all the time and will be pleased if you smile too. Smiling can be useful too as it often excuses mistakes or misunderstandings.
- Don't lose your temper. A person who does actually "loses face" in Thailand.
- Use titles when addressing someone. With adults always use "Khun" and then the first name. Surnames are rarely used.
- Don't open gifts from a Thai person in public
- Remove your shoes at the door before entering someone's home or small shop

Personal Safety

Although the crime threat in Bangkok and other Thai cities remains lower than in other countries, crimes of opportunity such as pick-pocketing, purse-snatching, and burglary are not unusual. You should be especially careful when walking in crowded markets, tourist sites, and bus or train stations. Many foreigners have reported having passports,

wallets, and other valuables stolen in Bangkok's Chatuchak Weekend Market, usually by pickpockets and thieves who cut into purses or bags with a razor and remove items.

Violent crimes against foreigners are relatively rare. However, there has been a recent upsurge in violent crime against tourists, including the murder of several independent travelers on the southern islands of Phuket and Koh Samui. If you are traveling alone, you should exercise caution and stay in the vicinity of other travelers, especially in the beach areas of these islands.

Serious crimes involving taxis or "tuk-tuks" (three-wheeled taxis) are relatively rare. However, every year foreign passengers are involved in taxi-related incidents. You should not hesitate to ask to be let out of a taxi immediately if the driver is acting suspiciously or driving erratically. Drivers often attempt to charge excessive fares. If possible, require the driver to use the meter.

When arriving at a Thai airport, you should use only taxis from the airport's official taxi stand, cars from the airport limousine counters, or airport buses. Major hotels also arrange to have a car and driver meet incoming flights. It is uncommon for Thai taxis to pick up additional passengers. You should be careful of drivers seeking to do so, and you should never enter a cab that has someone besides the driver in it.

Scams involving gems, city tours, entertainment venues, and credit cards are common, especially in areas heavily visited by tourists. Taxi drivers and others commonly tout gem stores or entertainment venues. These touts receive kickbacks or commissions that drive up the prices of the goods or services, and you should not accept tours or other offers from them. You should use credit cards only in reputable, established businesses, and you should check the amount you have been charged for accuracy.

If you are the victim of a crime, contact local police as well as your institutional PI.

Guide to Bangkok

Entertainment

Things to See

- The Grand Palace—Bangkok's "Old City" on Rattanakosin island.
- Wat Pho-- the world's largest reclining Buddha image and a famed massage school.
- Wat Arun—large temple decorated with colourful broken Chinese porcelain pieces.
- Major temples: the Golden Mount, Wat Suthat and Wat Ratchanaddaram.
- The Dusit Palace, situated in a leafy, European-style area built by King Rama V to escape the heat of the Grand Palace. Its main structure is the Vimanmek Mansion, touted as the largest golden teakwood house in the world.
- Jim Thompson's House; a mansion assembled by combining six traditional Thai-style houses, conveniently located near Siam Square.

- The National museum-- Thai history.
- The National Gallery or The Queen's Gallery are the two biggest art museums, but Bangkok has a small, but vocal art community, and you might want to visit one of its numerous smaller galleries spread over the city.
- Bangkok Art and Culture Centre in Siam Square-- temporary art exhibitions throughout the year.
- [Lumpini Park](#)-- close to the SEARCH office, it is the largest park in central Bangkok, and a good way to escape the smog. There are free aerobics daily from 5-7PM as well as an outdoor gym, basketball, tennis, badminton, a library, and festival grounds.
- For more information on community sports and family activities in and around Bangkok, refer to the local newspapers, the Bangkok Guide, the Big Chili magazine, and BK magazine.
- [Asiatique](#)
- [Central World](#)—particularly during the holidays for Christmas lights and New Year's fireworks.

Restaurants

- Tuba: Thai/American
- Checkmate
- Hemingway's
- Condoms and Cabbages: good food and family planning promotion!
- W District: outdoor food court
- Groove: restaurant complex
- FoodPanda: take-out
- Yaowarat area: Chinese food

Shopping

Like food, shopping opportunities are everywhere in Bangkok. With rapid development in recent years, malls have proliferated around the city, ranging from small neighborhood shopping centers to supermalls packed with hundreds of tiny storefronts (Platinum, Maboonkrong aka MBK) to middle-range malls with international brands (UNIQLO, GAP, Guess, Zara at CentralWorld) to luxury malls housing designer brands (Siam Paragon, Erawan Bangkok, Central Embassy). Interestingly, many malls group stores by type. For example, furniture shops are located on the 5th floor at MBK.

Buyer beware... some shops may not provide authentic parts or quality repair service.

Goods purchased at retail shops are subject to 7% value added tax (VAT). In general, products made in Thailand are cheap while those that are imported approximate US prices or higher. For example, Kellogg's corn flakes made in Thailand cost <\$2 USD while imported Honey Bunches of Oats cost >\$6 USD.

- Silom Complex: mall

- Siam Paragon: mall
- MBK: mall
- Central World: mall
- Platinum Mall
- Pantip Plaza: electronics
- Tesco: groceries
- Tops: groceries
- Big C: groceries, clothes, housewares
- Gourmet Market: groceries
- HomePro: home improvement, near Ploenchit BTS station
- Watson's: toiletries, beauty products
- Boots: toiletries, beauty products
- 7-Eleven: convenience store, top-up cards, bill-paying
- Patpong Night Market: street market, near Silom Road
- Sunday night street market near Sala Daeng BTS station
- Damnoen Saduak Floating Market: 1.5 hr drive from Bangkok
- Chatuchak Weekend Market: also known as JJ, near Mo Chit BTS
- Sam Pheng Market: Yaowarat Road
- Taling Chan: floating market

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