



## **Thailand 2012 Crime and Safety Report: Bangkok**

Stolen items; Fraud; Theft; Transportation Security; Counterfeiting; Separatist violence; Nationalist; Religious Terrorism; Improvised Explosive Device; Riots/Civil Unrest; Arson; Earthquakes; Floods; Drug Trafficking; Financial Security; Information Security

East Asia & Pacific > Thailand > Bangkok

3/14/2012

### **Overall Crime and Safety Situation**

#### **Crime Threats**

Bangkok has a relatively moderate crime rate when compared to urban counterparts around the world. Generally speaking, it is a safe place for those wishing to conduct business and for those taking part in the myriad of tourist activities.

Although the crime threat in Bangkok remains lower than in many American cities, non-confrontational crimes of opportunity such as pick-pocketing, purse-snatching, and credit card fraud occur with frequency. Travelers should be especially wary when walking in crowded markets, tourist sites, and bus or train stations (including the Skytrain and underground subway lines). In the past year, American citizens have reported passports, wallets, and other valuables being stolen. Purses, wallets, and back/fanny packs should be worn to the front in crowded areas.

An increasingly common technique is the motorcycle-assisted "snatch-and-grab" wherein the thief rides as a passenger on a motorcycle (or scooter) and grabs a purse as the driver speeds by the victim. While these thefts are generally non-violent, in 2009 a tourist from the United Kingdom targeted in such a robbery fell to the ground after a brief struggle with the thief and suffered a fatal head trauma. While the crime was meant to be non-violent, this episode demonstrates how easily even a non-violent crime can turn deadly.

Cities outside of Bangkok experience even lower crime rates. Nonetheless, visitors should remain vigilant regarding so-called "non-confrontational" crimes. Though violent crimes against foreigners are rare, they do occur when people do not follow logical safety and security procedures.



Reports of serious crimes involving taxis or "tuk-tuks" (three-wheeled taxis) are also relatively rare, although attempts to charge excessive fares occur regularly. Americans should not hesitate to ask to be let out of a taxi immediately if the driver is acting suspiciously or driving erratically. When riding in taxis, make sure that the driver turns on the meter. Visitors should exit the taxis immediately if the driver stops to pick up additional passengers. It is recommended that visitors do not enter a taxi that has someone in it besides the driver. When arriving at either of Bangkok's airports, travelers should use only taxis from the airport's official taxi stand, cars from the airport limousine counters, or airport buses. Visitors can have major hotels in Bangkok arrange for a car and driver to meet incoming flights.

Visitors should be aware of several commercial and merchant-based scams. These scams involve precious gems, tours, and entertainment events. Travelers should be wary of any implausible sale featuring precious gems and/or jewelry. Oftentimes kickbacks or commissions are involved, or the stones are fake. Some unscrupulous merchants may drive up the prices of the goods or services because they are dealing with Americans or foreigners. These merchants often have accomplices that work at the major tourist sites (i.e. Grand Palace, Wat Phro, etc.) whose job it is to convince marks that the site is closed and then offer their accomplice's business as an alternative. They will sometimes wear lanyards with laminated IDs to look more "official". The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) receives over 1,000 complaints each year from visitors who have been cheated on purchases.

## Road Safety

Traffic moves on the left, although motorcycles and motorized carts often drive (illegally) against the traffic flow. Traffic in Bangkok is a major safety problem with a mixture of motorcycles, cars, trucks, buses, and tuk-tuks. Accidents involving pedestrians and vehicles is the greatest safety/security concern for visitors. Accidents involving motorcycles can be particularly deadly. Motorcycles tend to weave in and out of traffic, and the skill and proficiency of these drivers is poor. Motorcycle-related deaths in Bangkok are a daily occurrence, and the use of motorcycle taxis is not recommended. The U.S. Embassy has sent a notice to Embassy staff and family members strongly recommending that they refrain from using motorcycles (especially motorcycle taxis), mopeds, and tuk-tuks in Bangkok. Buses and taxis are abundant and generally safe. Streets tend to be very congested, so passengers in taxis should only exit on the sidewalk side to avoid opening a door into an oncoming car or motorcycle. In addition, both the overground Skytrain and underground subway (MRT) are clean and safe and are recommended to save time and prevent frustration regarding Bangkok's notorious traffic conditions.



For safety, pedestrians are encouraged to utilize overhead walkways/pedestrian bridges whenever possible, especially in metropolitan Bangkok. Pedestrians should look carefully in both directions before crossing streets, even when using a marked crosswalk with a green "walk" light illuminated.

American citizen motorists should consider that it is customary during a traffic accident for the more affluent driver, even if not at fault, to pay the expenses of the other party. Thai police authorities determine fault in accidents, and frequently, for major accidents, those involved are brought to the local police station where senior officers will discuss the accident with the drivers, insurance representatives, and the police officers in an effort to determine where the fault lies.

The accident rate is particularly high during long holidays when alcohol use and traffic are both heavier than normal. During the Songkran (Thai New Year) holiday in April, the problem is further exacerbated by people throwing water at passing vehicles as part of the traditional celebration.

Paved roads, many of them four lanes wide, connect Thailand's major cities. On the country's numerous two-lane roads, however, slow-moving trucks limit speed and visibility. Speeding, reckless passing, and failure to obey traffic laws is common, as is the consumption by commercial drivers of alcohol, amphetamines, and other stimulants. Serious bus crashes occur frequently, especially on overnight trips, sometimes resulting in fatalities. Congested roads and a scarcity of ambulances can make it difficult for accident victims to receive timely medical attention.

## **Political Violence**

### **Historical Perspective**

The far south of Thailand experiences frequent incidents of both criminally and politically motivated violence, including incidents attributed to armed local separatist and extremist groups. These incidents frequently include drive-by shootings, ambushes, and small bomb attacks on Thai security patrols. These groups seek increased autonomy in furtherance of a separate state related to the partitioning of the Thai/Malaysia border in the early 1900s. There has been sporadic separatist violence over the last 100 years relating to this struggle.

The latest round of violence, generally identified as beginning in January 2004, has been a series of incidents in the far southern provinces. This includes arson attacks directed at schools and other buildings associated with the government; the placement of bombs in public



areas and near local government offices; killings of police, other officials, and civilians suspected of cooperating with authorities; and the theft of weapons and explosives. Attacks in the area have increasingly been targeted against commercial areas where foreigners might congregate. In 2005, two American citizens were injured when a bomb detonated in the Hat Yai Regional Airport. On September 17, 2006, a series of bombs detonated in a commercial district of Hat Yai, killing one American citizen and injuring another. Travelers should be aware that Thai authorities have instituted special security measures in affected areas, such as curfews, military patrols, or random searches of train passengers. In 2011, the three southernmost provinces (Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat) witnessed an escalation of violence with dozens of bombings and shootings, though no Americans were involved or injured. U.S. Embassy Bangkok requires all official travel to the southern regions of Thailand to be approved in advance by the Regional Security Officer and Deputy Chief of Mission.

Americans are encouraged to use caution and remain vigilant in areas with large public gatherings.

For a number of years, Thailand has also experienced limited violent incursions in the areas bordering Burma and Cambodia. Continued fighting between the Burmese Army and Karen separatist groups has led to numerous incidents of banditry in Thailand in years past. Heavily armed drug smugglers have also had deadly clashes with police in border areas near Burma.

### Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime

Southern Thailand continues to experience almost daily attacks directed at anything perceived to be associated with the Thai government. Although these groups primarily target Thai government entities (police, military, etc.), some of the recent violence has targeted public places, including areas where tourists may congregate. While there is no information indicating that these groups have targeted Westerners, American citizens have been “wrong place/wrong time” victims of this indiscriminate violence. The Department of State's Consular Information Sheet for Thailand urges U.S. citizens to defer non-emergency travel to the far south of Thailand: Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala Provinces. If American citizens must travel to these areas, they should exercise special caution and remain vigilant with regard to their personal security.

There are numerous international and indigenous organized crime elements operating throughout Thailand, but they are mainly concentrated within the major cities. Their activities include drugs, human trafficking, prostitution, document fraud, etc. The Royal Thai Police actively investigate these crimes, but due to corruption, resource limitations, and bureaucratic



inefficiency, the apprehension rate is extremely low. The U.S Embassy is unaware of any U.S. businesses that are experiencing problems associated with organized crime.

#### International Terrorism or Transnational Terrorism

Persons with known transnational terrorist associations transit and visit Thailand with relative ease through legal and illegal means. In 2003, senior Jemaah Islamiyya/Al Qaeda (JI/AQ) leader Hambali was captured just north of Bangkok. These travel routes include not only the Burmese and Cambodian borders but also the Malaysian border. Soft target vulnerabilities exist throughout the country that could easily be exploited by transnational terrorist elements. Recent police investigations have uncovered terrorist cells operating out of Bangkok, and while there have been no external terrorist attacks to date, American citizens traveling to Thailand are advised to exercise caution, especially in locations where Westerners congregate and remain vigilant with regard to their own personal security.

In January 2012, Royal Thai Police made a series of arrests and searches that uncovered a hidden cache of more than 4,000 kilograms of explosive materials.

The U.S. Embassy issued an Emergency Message to American Citizens regarding the possibility of foreign terrorist attacks in areas of Bangkok frequented by tourists. All American citizens were warned to keep a low profile and exercise good situational awareness when moving around the city, particularly in heavy tourist areas. The U.S. Department of State has issued a series of Public Announcements (<http://www.travel.state.gov>) cautioning American citizens against traveling in locations where there are continued threats of terrorist actions and anti-American violence.

In February 2012, a suspected Iranian terror cell was discovered when an improvised explosive device (IED) they were handling accidentally detonated in the house they were renting in Central Bangkok near Ekamai BTS station. Royal Thai Police responded to the explosion and arrested two Iranian nationals within hours of the blast. To date, the police continue to investigate the case and have issued five arrest warrants associated with the incident.

American citizens should be aware of the higher risk of attack associated with congregating or visiting facilities where American citizens and other foreigners congregate as such places may be attractive targets to terrorist groups. This includes clubs, restaurants, residential areas, places of worship, hotels, schools, business offices, outdoor recreational events, resorts, and beaches in some southern regions of Thailand.



## Civil Unrest

From March 2010 to May 2010, supporters of exiled former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra—known as the United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD or “Red Shirts”)—staged large-scale protests in Bangkok and other areas of the country. Demonstrations in Bangkok drew as many as 100,000 persons, causing the government to invoke an Emergency decree on April 7 after protesters invaded parliament. The protest became violent, with armed clashes between UDD protesters and government security forces in April and again in May, resulting in 92 fatalities and over 1,800 injured persons in a three-month period. In April 2010, the demonstrators occupied the Ratchaprasong intersection, located at the heart of Bangkok's commercial district. The circumstances surrounding the deaths have never been fully explained. In 2011, Thailand elected Thaksin's sister Yingluck as Prime Minister—the first female PM in the country's history—and while her Puea Thai-led coalition has governed with a strong mandate, significant underlying social tensions remain. With political reconciliation unlikely in the near-term, these tensions could lead to further open conflict particularly if former PM Thaksin returns.

In April, violent clashes occurred between UDD protesters and government security forces on Ratchadamnoen Road near Phan Fah Bridge; live ammunition and war-grade weaponry was used by both sides, according to eyewitness reports and the media. By the following morning, 25 persons had been killed, including 10 protesters, nine civilians, one foreign journalist, and five members of the security forces.

In May, arsonist burned a portion of Central World, and security forces dispersed the protesters, with casualties reported on both sides totaling 92 killed and over 1,800 injured, along with a foreign journalist.

The UDD continued to hold large protests throughout the rest of 2010 and into 2011, though no further clashes took part between authorities and protestors. In national elections held in July 2011, Abhisit was ousted by Yingluck Shinawatra who represented Puea-Thai and the UDD faction. Since the election of PM Yingluck, the UDD has not gathered in large numbers, although UDD leaders have threatened wider protests and have held occasional small protests to free imprisoned UDD leaders. The underlying causes of the 2010 and 2011 protests have not been resolved. It remains an open questions whether political and societal conflict will again reach the street or if it can be managed through an orderly reconciliation process.





All demonstrations are unpredictable, and any demonstration can turn violent without warning. For this reason, the U.S. Embassy encourages all Americans to monitor local media for announcements of possible demonstrations and to avoid the areas where demonstrations might occur. If a demonstration is expected to pass near U.S. Embassy facilities, Embassy entrances and functions may be restricted, depending on circumstances.

## **Post-Specific Concerns**

### **Environmental Hazards**

Thailand has several earthquake fault lines. In December 2004, a major underwater earthquake off the coast of northern Indonesia caused one of the deadliest tsunamis in recorded history, resulting in over 200,000 deaths in the region. Thailand's popular Andaman Sea coastline, including the popular tourist island of Phuket, was affected by up to a 10-meter tsunami wave that devastated the western coast and caused several thousand deaths of citizens and tourists. Small earthquakes continue throughout the region, all of which cause little to no damage.

Thailand can experience serious flooding during the rainy season (usually July through October). In October 2011, Thailand suffered disaster-scale flooding as a result of heavy rains, which plagued all of Southeast Asia. The historic province of Ayudhya, site of many ancient ruins and temples, was submerged in three meters of water, along with surrounding central provinces. Much of Bangkok's northern and western neighborhoods experienced at least a meter of flooding. Central Bangkok, with its tourist and commercial-heavy districts, remained relatively dry due to a series of canals and civic flood-control measures.

### **Industrial and Transportation Accidents**

Ferries and speedboats used to transport tourists and local nationals to and from the many islands off the Thai mainland are often overcrowded and carry insufficient safety equipment. In January 2005, three U.S. citizens died when the over-crowded speedboat they were in capsized and sank off the coast of Koh Samui. The Department of State encourages American citizens to avoid travel on overcrowded boats and to ensure that proper safety equipment is available before boarding any boat or ferry.

Air travel remains a relatively safe option. The last accident occurred on September 16, 2007, when One-To-Go flight OG 269 crashed at Phuket International Airport, killing 90 people, including five American citizens.



## Kidnappings

Thailand has not seen kidnappings happen within its borders, but given the number of organized crime elements, the potential threat of kidnapping, albeit small, exists.

## Drugs and Narco-terrorism

Thailand strictly enforces drug laws and penalties for the possession, use, or trafficking in illegal drugs. Thailand's enforcement efforts include the death penalty for drug smuggling. Convicted offenders can expect long prison sentences under harsh conditions and heavy fines. Several Americans are in Thai prisons for trafficking illicit drugs. Some Americans have been duped into carrying a package with illegal drugs by the promise of a vacation to Thailand. Lack of knowledge of the contents of a package is not a legal defense.

Thai police occasionally raid discos, bars, or nightclubs looking for underage patrons and drug users. During the raids, they typically check the IDs of all customers in the establishment and then make each person provide a urine sample to be checked for narcotics. Foreigners are not excused from these checks, and anyone whose urine tests positive for drugs is arrested and charged. Although some Thai civil libertarians have questioned the constitutionality of these forced urine tests, the U.S. Embassy is unaware of any successful challenge to the practice, and customers can be jailed if they do not cooperate.

The Royal Thai government continues to fight drug smuggling along its border with Burma. Heavily armed drug smugglers routinely have deadly clashes with Thai Border and Narcotics Police in these areas. Persons wishing to travel to the border areas should check with Thai Tourist Police, or visit [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov) for the most up to date travel warnings for American citizens traveling to the region

## Police Response

In the event of any type of theft, travelers should report the loss to the police. Thailand has an attentive Tourist Police Division comprised of English-speaking personnel designed specifically to address crimes committed against foreigners in Thailand. Tourist Police are stationed in popular tourist areas and are typically multi-lingual. They are generally very helpful in assisting tourists with minor crimes, scams, or other problems. The Tourist Police Division of the Royal Thai Police can be reached at 1155. The general police emergency number is 191.





The local police are generally effective in assisting with minor crimes, but a lack of funding, inadequate training, and frequent leadership shake-ups prevent them from operating with the effectiveness or professionalism one typically associates with a modern mega-city. Response to calls for service will be better in larger cities than in smaller towns and provinces. Police effectiveness and their ability to conduct follow-up criminal investigations is hampered by both a lack of funding and limited training.

#### How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Remain calm and ask for an English-speaking officer. Tourist Police generally speak English with many metropolitan police having some English-speaking ability. Police officers outside the major tourist destinations frequently do not speak English. Since Thailand is not a signatory to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, the U.S. Embassy frequently does not learn of the arrest of U.S. citizens for minor drug offenses, particularly in southern Thailand, until several days after the incident. Please ask to contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate General for assistance if detained or arrested by police.

The Embassy/Consulate staff can assist you to find appropriate medical care, to contact family members or friends, and explain how funds could be transferred. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help arrested American citizens understand the local criminal justice process and to find an attorney if needed.

#### Where to Turn to for Assistance if you Become a Victim of a Crime and Local Police Telephone Numbers

##### BANGKOK

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POLICE EMERGENCY (METRO): 191  
POLICE ROUTINE (METRO): 02-280-5060  
TOURIST POLICE: 1155  
FIRE EMERGENCY: 199  
AMERICAN EMBASSY: 02-205-4000

##### CHIANG MAI

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POLICE EMERGENCY (LOCAL): 191  
POLICE ROUTINE (LOCAL): 05-327-6040



TOURIST POLICE: 1155  
AMERICAN CONSULATE GENERAL: 05-325-2629

#### PHUKET

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POLICE EMERGENCY (LOCAL): 191  
POLICE ROUTINE (LOCAL): 07-621-2115  
TOURIST POLICE (LOCAL): 1155

#### **Medical Emergencies**

Contact the police (191) in a medical emergency, and they will summon an ambulance to your location. Individual hospitals have ambulance services. However, in Bangkok, these services should not be relied upon due to severe traffic congestion. Taxis are commonly used to transport patients to hospitals.

Medical treatment is generally adequate throughout Thailand. In Bangkok, excellent facilities exist for routine, long-term, and emergency health care. Smaller towns and outlying facilities lack the facilities, expertise, and various medical personnel resident in major metropolitan areas.

#### Contact Information for Local Hospitals and Clinics

##### Bangkok

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Bumrungrad Hospital - 02-667-1000  
BNH Hospital - 02-686-2700  
Samitivej Hospital - 02-711-8000  
Bangkok Hospital - 02-310-3102

##### Phuket

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Phuket-Bangkok Hospital - 07-625-4425

#### Air Ambulance Services

Helicopter Medevac service is available on a very limited basis. Bangkok Hospital (02-310-3102) advertises that it can assist in Medevac situations throughout Thailand.



## Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Although street crime is the most prevalent, violent crimes involving Americans and foreigners do occur. Personal security measures and common sense should be exercised at all times. At night, travel with someone and avoid walking on poorly lit streets and alleys. The most common crimes are purse snatching, pick pocketing, and petty theft. Credit card fraud and identity theft schemes are active. Travelers should be careful to safeguard their valuables at all times.

Travelers to Thailand should carefully review the Safety and Security sections of the U.S. Department of State's Country Specific Information sheet for Thailand available at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov) for additional information.

## Areas to Avoid

The U.S. Department of State's Country Specific Information Sheet for Thailand advises American Citizens to defer all non-emergency travel to Thailand's three southern-most provinces. Although there are currently no known active indigenous terrorist or rebel groups directly hostile to the United States in Thailand, periodic violence directed at Thai government interests--and more recently public places—by an indigenous insurgency continues to plague the southernmost areas of Thailand. For this reason, American citizens are currently urged to defer all non-emergency travel to the provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat.

Persons wishing to travel to the border areas of Burma and Cambodia should check with Thai Tourist Police or visit <http://www.travel.state.gov> for the most up to date travel warnings for American Citizens traveling to the region.

## Further Information

U.S. Embassy Bangkok

Regional Security Officer: 02 205-4333;  
Embassy operator: 02 205-4000;  
Medical Unit: 02 205-5508;  
American Citizen Services Duty Officer: 081 173 0144;  
Marine Post 1: 02 205-4108.



NOTE: If calling from outside Thailand, add the country code for Thailand (66) and drop the first zero in the number being called.

### **OSAC Country Council**

The Thailand OSAC Country Council and the American Chamber of Commerce are based in Bangkok. The AmCham meets on a monthly basis and can be contacted through the Chamber of Commerce at 66-2-254-1041 or [www.amchamthailand.com](http://www.amchamthailand.com).