

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Though Thailand is a relatively safe destination, having your wits about you and using common sense will improve your chances of having a trouble-free holiday. In reality you are more likely to be ripped off or have a personal possession surreptitiously stolen than you are to be physically harmed. When considering your personal safety "common sense precautions" still reign supreme - just like anywhere else.

SCAMS

Thais can be so friendly and laid-back that some visitors are lulled into a false sense of security, making them vulnerable to scams of all kinds. Bangkok is especially good at long-involved frauds that dupe travellers into thinking they've made a friend and are getting a bargain, when in fact they are getting ripped off.

Don't simply trust a tout or stranger and let them lead you away from, or to, a location other than your intended one. Don't buy gemstones unless you are qualified to know their value, and can judge good quality from poor. Encounters such as these can potentially lead to you becoming the victim of a scam. At bus stations and train stations, always ignore touts and go directly to the Official ticket seller's window. In many cases, tickets for Muay Thai boxing and movies sold thru unofficial channels are invalid and/or forgeries.

Follow **Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT)** number-one suggestion to tourists: Disregard all offers of free shopping or sightseeing help from strangers. These invariably take a commission from your purchases.

THEFT & FRAUD

Accommodation: Exercise diligence when it comes to your personal belongings. Ensure your room is securely locked and carry your most important effects (passport, money, credit cards) on your person. Take care when leaving valuables in hotel safes. Keep a photocopy of your passport, airline tickets and credit card numbers in a safe place separate from the originals.

Day/Back Packs - Handbags - Shoulder Bags: In busy tourist centres, petty theft can sometimes be a problem. There have been incidents of bag snatchers on motorbikes. Keep your bag clutched tightly and securely to your side when walking. In crowded conditions, consider wearing your day-pack in front of you instead of on your back. Be aware of persons who may innocently "bump" into you as a means to distract you.

Jewellery: Best advice? Do not bring it, if possible. However, if you must wear expensive jewellery, do so discreetly. When riding motorbikes or in the back of Songthaews, keep your necklace tucked well inside your clothing, or better yet, leave it in your hotel room safe. Thieves are very adept at snatching these items from your neck, and while in motion. This is not

uncommon, in busy areas, it is indiscriminate - Thai people are just as likely to be the victims of this type of theft.

ATMs: When practical try to use ATMs that are inside a bank or inside a secured building. If you must use one in a shopping mall or street make sure you cover the keypad (with your other hand) as you enter your PIN and DO NOT walk away counting your cash.

Credit Card Fraud: When using a credit card, don't let vendors take your card out of your sight to run it through the machine. Watch as it's used, and double check the purchase amount and currency, before signing or entering your pin number. Once you sign the receipt, in most cases you are accepting and agree to pay that amount. Unscrupulous merchants have been known to rub off four or more receipts with one purchase. Sometimes they wait several weeks – even months – between submitting each charge receipt to the bank, so that you can't remember whether you'd been billed by the same vendor more than once.

TAXIS

In most major centres, taxis are plentiful, metered and inexpensive and a good way to get around, especially at night. Bangkok taxis are a very safe mode of transport and operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If you would like to use a taxi in the area of Bangkok, you should be aware that the **meter should always be on**, just point at the meter if it is not and if the taxi driver doesn't turn it on then use another taxi. Otherwise, they can charge you more. Presenting yourself with an air of confidence, knowing that the meter must **start at THB35** and be prepared to get out and take another taxi if not. Also, for journeys outside Bangkok, you need to negotiate the price before you start. Furthermore, only pay when you have arrived at your specified destination. Don't engage the driver in unnecessary conversation. If needed, repeat your destination confidently, clearly, slowly, and politely. Don't take taxis parked by hotels or tourist attractions, there are so many that it is far better to flag down a passing taxi.

Most hotels offer business cards written in both Thai and English. Keep one with you in the event that you can't clearly communicate your destination to a taxi driver. If your hotel only has cards in English, ask a staff member to write the name, address and phone numbers in the Thai language on a card for you.

TUK-TUK

It's part of the Thai experience to try a tuk-tuk at least once, however as a general rule, it's best to avoid them as a primary means of transportation. If you must use a tuk-tuk, unlike a taxi, you have to negotiate the fare to your destination first, and don't pay until your safe arrival. Do not let them take you to tailors, gem stores, or anywhere else that you didn't ask to go. Do not let them talk you into sightseeing, and other "special" sites. If a Tuk Tuk driver offers a fare below THB50 they will try to take you to other locations. A Tuk Tuk ride is a fun thing to do, but just let them know exactly where you want to go and tell them you'll pay THB50.

EATING OUT

To avoid a "surprise" bill, avoid any restaurant or bar that doesn't clearly display or otherwise quote their prices. It is perfectly ok to ask a street vendor or other merchant "how much" before ordering. Once you've consumed it, you've bought it – so be aware of the prices before hand. It's a good idea to stock up on some "emergency food" especially with children. If you can't find a suitable in a hurry keep some wafers or other biscuits bought at a local 7/11 store for THB5.

CLUBS, PUBS AND PARTIES

Most importantly NEVER leave your drink unattended, NEVER accept a drink from a stranger or recent acquaintance. Drink Spiking -- the act of covertly adding chemicals or drugs to your drink -- is not unheard of and the consequences speak for themselves. Similarly don't leave your cash and valuables unattended. Be aware of your alcohol consumption, try not to overindulge and not be able to safely make your way home. It's possible that someone may be watching and assessing how easy a target you'd make.

MOVING AROUND AT NIGHT

Obviously avoiding dimly lit and seemingly uninhabited areas is good personal safety practise. Stay in well lit areas, where there are lots of people. Any place that gives you an initial, serious feeling of unease is best avoided.

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

Always be aware of your surroundings, and be mindful of how you would describe your exact location in an emergency situation. Make a note of the Thai Tourist Police generic phone number which is 1155 and add it to your cell phone speed dial list. The Thai Tourist Police is a special arm of the National Royal Thai Police and specifically trained to deal with common situations involving a non-resident tourist. Many speak basic and passable English.

If you are confronted with any situation where trustworthy assistance is not close at hand, DIAL THE NUMBER!