

UNIT

1

Thailand



Thailand, a tropical pearl in Southeast Asia, has experienced various development phases, and the 21st century heralds a new chapter of its development. The Belt and Road Initiative, especially the Eastern Economic Corridor project, which includes the high-speed railway from Bangkok to Rayong, the reconstruction of the U-Tapao International Airport, and the expansion of the deep-water port of Laem Chabang, is making Thailand a leading business centre in the ASEAN region.



Lead-in

Watch a video about Thailand and answer the following questions.

- 1 What is Thailand known as and why?
- 2 Why does the speaker like Thailand?
- 3 What is Thailand best known for geographically?
- 4 Why does the speaker say rivers have a huge impact on life in Thailand?



Word tips

demeanour /di'mi:nə/ *n.* 举止; 外表; 风度

tropical /'trɒpɪkəl/ *a.* 热带的

infrastructure /'ɪnfɹə'strʌktʃə/ *n.* 基础设施

destination /,destɪ'neɪʃən/ *n.* 目的地

peninsula /pɪ'nɪnsjələ/ *n.* 半岛

plain /pleɪn/ *n.* 平原

Bangkok /,bæŋ'kɒk/ 曼谷 (泰国首都和最大城市)

plateau /'plætəʊ/ *n.* 高原

Chao Phraya /tʃaʊprə'jɑ:/ River 昭披耶河

Mekong /'meɪ'kɒŋ/ River 湄公河

tributary /'trɪbjʊtəri/ *n.* 支流

Overview

Country profile

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy. It can be divided into five distinct geographical regions, bordering Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia. The capital Bangkok, with a population of over eight million, is the most important city economically and politically. Thailand contains more than 30 ethnic groups varying in history, language, religion, appearance, and livelihood. The Thai people account for about 40 percent of the total population of Thailand.

The Thai economy is heavily dependent on exports. Thailand is the biggest exporter of natural rubber in the world. Thailand's traditional major markets have been China, Japan, the United States, and the EU. Agriculture is also a major contributor to the Thai economy. Lastly, the massive tourism industry is another powerful economic engine for Thailand.

Thailand is a country of natural beauty, humid tropical climate and warm hospitality. Thailand, formerly known as Siam (暹罗), is the only country in Southeast Asia which has remained independent throughout its history. Thais are very proud of this and this sense of independence is reflected in their culture. Due to historical factors, Thailand's neighbouring countries have come under a high degree of foreign influence. While in Thailand, especially in Bangkok, a good balance between foreign cultures and Thai culture can be found almost everywhere. And in a way this reflects the Thai value of being open to other cultures.

Official name – The Kingdom of Thailand

Official language – Thai

Currency – Baht (THB 泰铢)

Capital city – Bangkok



Key cultural concepts



Family values

As the cornerstone of Thai society, family is given great value and importance. Families in Thailand are close. In Thailand, it is common to see several generations living under the same roof with the eldest male member being the head of the family. The power structure of the family is also reflected in the business world. The advice of the elders is expected to be heeded without question.

Indirectness

Being subtle and indirect is an important feature of Thai culture. In communication, a considerable part of the information lies in the underlying messages or non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, body movements, and gestures. In order not to lose face, Thais tend to avoid direct confrontation. Criticism is best passed on indirectly, and it is best to avoid displaying strong emotions publicly. Behaviour like raising your voice, getting angry or insulting others can lead your Thai business partners to think negatively of you.

Hospitality

It is the nature of Thais to be warm and hospitable, both in social and professional settings. Thais will show their generosity by welcoming guests into their homes and offering the best they may have. Thais are generally very easygoing – they have a *mai pen rai* (“没关系”或“不客气”) attitude, which shows that they generally try not to get stressed about small issues. Service is considered very serious in Thailand and is usually provided with modesty.

Religion

Most Thais practise Buddhism. You should treat images of Buddha with extreme respect whenever you see one or are invited to temples by your Thai business partners. There are some important Buddhist festivals in Thailand such as Makha Bucha Day (玛迦普差节) and Asahna Bucha Day (三宝佛节). Businesses are usually closed for holidays during these festivals.

In Buddhist culture, the feet are the lowest part of the body and considered unclean. If you accidentally point at your Thai business partner using any part of your foot, or show the sole of your foot, or use the foot to move anything, you would be considered rather rude and disrespectful. Also, be sure to take your shoes off when entering a Thai business partner's home, places of worship, and some particular hotel rooms. Don't put your feet up on a table or any other furniture and don't step over anyone sitting on the floor. Make sure you step over thresholds, not on it; otherwise this will cause bad fortune according to Thai religious beliefs.

For Thai Buddhists, the head is the most sacred part of the body. You may be used to touching someone's head to show affection, but in Thailand, it is often inappropriate to do so.



B business knowledge

Business etiquette

Greetings

Even though in most cases business will be conducted in English or with the help of interpreters, you may still encounter the traditional Thai greetings. Learning how to greet Thai people as the locals do will create a positive first impression, which plays a crucial role in future business relationships.

Greetings in Thailand have a slight variation based on whether you're a man or a woman.

Thai people usually greet each other by saying *sawasdee* with an ending that reflects their gender. Women will use *kah* and men will use *khrap*.

So, when being introduced to your

Thai business partners, you say *sawasdee kah* if you are female or *sawasdee khrap* if you are male.

Another common gesture traditionally used when greeting someone is the *wai*. This gesture is performed by putting your hands together and bowing slightly. When you meet your Thai business partners, you are not expected to pledge a *wai*, but it would be an insult not to return the *wai*. What's more, *wai* gestures are offered to a person of equal or greater status. Those who are younger and of lesser status are to give the *wai* to those who are older or with higher seniority. The higher the hand is placed, the more respectful it is.



Business cards

A high-quality business card is an important asset in Thailand and should be exchanged when initiated by the host. When you receive a business card, it is important to read it and then put it away. Your own business card should be offered to the most senior person in a meeting before anyone else. It is imperative that cards be given and received with both hands. Business cards should contain information which states your position within your company, so that your Thai business partners understand your place within the company hierarchy (等级制度).

Names and titles

As in most English-speaking countries, in Thailand, the first name refers to one's given name while the last name refers to one's family name. It's important to note that Thais tend to use first names rather than last names, so you can expect to be addressed by your first name and title even in business situations.

Most Thai people have nicknames – a shorter and easier-to-remember name given by their parents. Nicknames are useful because Thai people's full names are often too long and complicated, which makes them hard to spell and hard to remember. You may call your Thai business partners by their nicknames once you become more familiar with them. However, you should avoid being too informal in business meetings or with people who are much higher in the company hierarchy than you.

Patience

Before making a decision, Thais often need to consult with several people. Sometimes, it is unlikely that any decisions will be made in a first meeting and it will probably require several business meetings to reach a consensus. Thus, patience is an essential quality when you conduct business negotiations with Thais.

Punctuality (守时)

Punctuality is appreciated. You are expected to arrive on time for meetings and social gatherings. It is advisable to check the traffic situation in large cities beforehand, especially in Bangkok, as the time it takes to get from one place to another can sometimes be unpredictable. In formal situations, it is better to arrive a few minutes earlier. If you are just on time, or even a minute or two late for a meeting, it may be viewed as unprofessional.

Dress code

Although the business dress code is not strictly formal, it is important to wear suitable attire when you are invited to formal business meetings in Thailand, because that will allow you to be taken seriously by your Thai business partners. As for businessmen, conservative coloured suits with a shirt and a tie are appropriate. Jackets would be a nice addition, especially for meetings with senior partners. For businesswomen, a blouse or shirt with long trousers or a skirt that is long enough to cover the knees is appropriate. Tight fitting and sleeveless clothes should be avoided. Shoes need to be taken off in some offices and homes; therefore it is a good idea to wear shoes that are easy to slip on and off. Smart casual is acceptable for business social events.

Gift-giving

Giving gifts to your business partners is highly encouraged in Thailand, but there are certain rules to follow. It is important to both give and receive gifts with both hands. As for proper gifts, bringing something small from your own country such as food or alcohol is a good idea. It is considered rude to open a gift in the presence of the gift giver.



Table manners

Paying close attention to dining etiquette will make a good impression on your Thai business

partners. The most senior person usually sits at the head of the table and you should not take your seat before they have sat down first. Sometimes shoes should be removed when you are invited to some restaurants. Most kinds of Thai food are eaten with a fork and a tablespoon rather than with chopsticks. You can hold the fork in your left hand and the spoon in your right hand. The fork is used to move food from the plate onto the spoon. Only some exclusive food is eaten with your hand and make sure you use your right hand. Unless you are extremely hungry, don't eat all the food on your plate since an empty plate is a sign that you are still hungry and it will be refilled.



Business practices

Structure and hierarchy in Thai companies

Thai companies have a culture which emphasises hierarchy and respect for the elders, thus senior staff and executives are obeyed and respected. This business culture bears some of the characteristics of the working practice in other Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and India. Regardless of the size or nature of a company, hierarchy is an integral part of business culture in Thailand.

In many Thai companies, a vertical structure is adopted, with power coming from the top. Discussions are mostly led by people at the highest levels and it is the responsibility of the top management to supervise and look after the subordinates. The final decision-making power is in the hands of the top management of the business, so it is very important to maintain good relations with the top people.

Appointments

Business appointments are generally scheduled well in advance and confirmed the day beforehand. The traffic in big cities such as Bangkok can be unpredictable. So it is a good idea to consult the company you are visiting about the traffic conditions before you leave for the appointment. If you find yourself late for the appointment on the way, it is a good idea to call and inform the people you are about to meet.

Business negotiations

As mentioned in the early part, business decisions are reached quite slowly. Thus, it is important to remain patient during negotiations. Pressure tactics should be avoided.

Small talk is actually expected at the beginning of a business negotiation. Diving straight into negotiations without having a little friendly chat is viewed as bad manners.

Communication

The use of English during international business exchanges is common, especially if your Thai business partners are from large companies in Bangkok, where presentations, proposals and contracts in English are acceptable. If language is an issue, an interpreter should be provided, especially when you are dealing with traditional Thai firms.

Communication style in Thai business environment is sensitive and courteous. You should give great care to not offending any of your Thai business partners. Frankness is not appreciated as indirectness is highly valued in Thai culture. You should try to be subtle when responding to your Thai business partners' offer with a negative reply. Usually, when a direct, confrontational type of statement can't be avoided, it is advisable to begin

with something like “if you will allow me to be very frank”, and this kind of wording will excuse the occasional blunt statement.

Business relationships

Thais tend to do business with people that they know well. Thus, establishing a good relationship with a company before any deal can be finalised is an imperative thing to do in Thailand. Thais may ask for personal information such as your age, marital status and educational background to help them understand your status in society and build a sense of familiarity with you. It is also commonplace to be invited for a round of golf or some other kind of social activity. Much of this is an effort by your Thai business partners to get to know you better, so just accept the invitation and take it as an opportunity to forge a successful partnership with your Thai business partners.

Pitfalls

✘ **Pitfall 1 Make joke of or criticise the Thai King or Queen.**

Don't badmouth the Thai King or Queen. Patriotism (爱国心) and national pride are part of the Thai psyche (精神), and the royal family are extremely respected. Saying anything bad about the monarchy is an extremely dangerous thing to do in Thailand. Not only will it offend your potential business partners, but it could also put you behind bars.

✘ **Pitfall 2 Touch your Thai business partner's head.**

Don't touch your Thai business partner's head because in the Buddhist tradition, the head is considered to be the most important and holy part of a person's body. Touching your Thai business partner's head will cause great offense.

✘ **Pitfall 3 Go into a Thai business partner's house with your shoes on.**

Don't wear your shoes while walking into the house when invited into your Thai business partner's home. If you do so, you can lose all the respect and closeness you have worked so hard to build with your Thai business partners.

Career skills

Skills sharpening

Writing a business memo

A business memo, or business memorandum, is a simple and efficient document that is used to transmit information within an organisation. Memos are meant to be brief, direct, clear and to-the-point.

Memos are used for a wide variety of purposes. They may be used to provide information about policy changes, promotions or personnel changes, to enquire about a project status update, or to apply for office supplies. They can also be used to arrange a meeting, to request changes made to work procedures, to address a problem, or to provide feedback on a product or programme etc.

As memos are used for internal communication, the language can be more relaxed than that in a business letter.

Structure

A business memo usually begins with a header section listing the recipient and other details in the following format.

To: Include the name and title of each recipient (eg Miranda Lawson, Marketing Director). However, if you are writing to a designated group, simply state the name of that group (eg the Accounting Department).

From: Include the name and title of the sender.

Date: Put down the full date (eg 30 June 2017).

Subject: This is a phrase to tell the reader what the memo is about, for example, changing of company name or meeting cancellation etc. Make sure the subject is concise and descriptive.

Body: The body of a memo should be short and concentrate on one idea in each paragraph. For memos with three or more paragraphs, it is advisable to begin each paragraph with a heading in capital letters to tell the reader what the paragraph is about. You can also number the paragraphs for easy reference later on.

Carbon copy: This is written as c.c. for short. It lists the names of the people who are also receiving the memo.

Large enterprises tend to have many branches, and their business memos may contain more content, such as Branch office, Dept. (部门), Location, Ext. (分机号) etc.

Business memos usually skip the salutation (eg Dear Ms Lawson) and go immediately to the body.

Whenever you start a paragraph in your memo, be sure to keep the main content of that paragraph in the forefront, as this will make your writing straightforward and easy to understand.

Generally, memos do not include a complimentary closing (eg Sincerely, Tonya).

Writing tips

As in most essential business writings, revision is vital for any quality document. Read your memo and cut the unnecessary messages, clarify your main points, and proofread for grammar and factual errors.

Memos can be sent to a person or a group, so tailor your message to the audience's focus. As with any business document, remain professional and courteous even if you have to deal with a negative topic. And before you submit your memo to your audience, consider getting feedback from a colleague to ensure your message is effective and professional.

Useful expressions

- Please be informed that ...
- Please note that ...
- Please be sure to have the forms filled in and returned to the Administrative Office by ...
- It has come to my attention that ...
- This month's staff meeting is to be held on ...
- I am writing to enquire about ...
- The board urgently requires feedback on ...
- We need an update on ...
- In response to your request, I am writing to provide you with information on ...
- I am writing to apply for a ...
- I / We would like to ...

Read the following business memos and label each memo with its purpose in the marked A, B, C, D and E.

A. inform

B. arrange

C. apply

D. enquire

E. request

_____ **1** As a result of our merger with Mason & Co., the name of our company will be changed to Mason Golding. Please start to use the new name from 1 March 2021. You are reminded that only the new name can be used from then on.

_____ **2** I need to have an urgent meeting with Pierre Blanco of our Paris office tomorrow. Please book a return ticket to Paris, and a hotel room for me as soon as possible. During my absence, please keep me informed of the progress of the project. If there is anything urgent, give me a phone call.

_____ **3** I am writing to ask about the reason for the late delivery of the ordered components. We need the components by next Monday. In order to smooth our cooperation, I suggest that we have a meeting to discuss future deliveries.

_____ **4** This is to inform you that the next project meeting will be postponed. Because several team members will be abroad for another project, we will hold our next meeting on 1 August, starting at 9 am. Please let me know if you have any suggestions as to the agenda of the meeting.

_____ **5** I am writing to apply for a replacement calculator. The old one went missing after the client meeting yesterday. As a calculator is essential to my daily work, could you kindly approve this request?

Exercises

Knowledge focus

1 Fill in the blanks in the note according to the Overview section.

Thailand

Location: 1) _____ Asia

Capital city: 2) _____

Official currency: 3) _____

Thailand is divided into 4) _____ distinct geographical regions.

5) _____ people make up 40 percent of the population of Thailand.

Thailand's economy is heavily dependent on 6) _____.

Cultural concepts

As the cornerstone of Thai society, 7) _____ is given great value and importance.

In order not to lose face, Thais avoid direct 8) _____.

Thais will show their 9) _____ by welcoming guests into their homes and offering the best they may have.

Most Thai people value the 10) _____ tradition.

11) _____ is viewed as the most inferior and unclean part of the body by Buddhists.

2 Read the following statements and decide whether they are true (T) or false (F) according to the Business etiquette section.

- _____ 1 You are expected to perform the *wai* gesture when you greet your Thai business partners.
- _____ 2 In Thailand, business cards should be handed first to the people of the same level as you.
- _____ 3 You can call your Thai business partners by their nicknames after you become acquainted with them.
- _____ 4 You can arrive at your Thai business partner's brief meeting a bit late to show your patience.
- _____ 5 It is a good idea to wear formal jackets, especially when meeting with your Thai business partners of a higher position.
- _____ 6 If your Thai business partner gives you a small gift, it's rude to open it in front of him or her.

3 Answer the following questions according to the Business practices section.

- 1 What do you know about typical Southeast Asian hierarchal companies? You can take Thai companies for example.
- 2 What should you do when making appointments with your Thai business partners?
- 3 What would be a good idea when negotiating with Thais and why?
- 4 What should you pay more attention to when communicating with your Thai business partners?

Case study

4 Analyze the following cases and answer the questions.

Case study 1

Xiao Wang is a business representative of a Chinese foreign trade company. He was on a business trip in charge of closing a deal with a company in Thailand. Before their first business meeting, the Thai business representative asked him whether he was married and how he achieved his status in the company. Xiao Wang avoided these personal questions by joking about the figure printed on the Thai currency. Later, Xiao Wang lost this crucial business partner, causing huge financial losses to his company.

- 1) What might be the underlying reasons for Xiao Wang's failure to keep his Thai business partner?
- 2) What should Xiao Wang do instead?

Case study 2

A Thai company manager invited all the company staff in his department to a party at his home. Among all the foreign colleagues invited, there is one called Mike Dawson. When Mike showed up at the manager's house, he was empty-handed. He walked straight to the backyard of the house where the party was held. The Thai manager appeared upset and kept staring down at Mike's feet.

- 1) Why did the Thai manager appear upset?
- 2) What should Mike do instead?

Writing task

5 Write a business memo based on the following situation.

Imagine you are the Director of Shipping at an international shipping company, and your company has just issued a new loading procedure with your Thai business partners. You have been asked to inform the loading dock staff of the change of procedure. Read the following business memo and identify all the weak points in this memo. Then rewrite it in a more appropriate way.

✉ Send □ - ×

To: Loading Dock Staff

From: Philip Yuen, Director of Shipping

Date: 30 May, 2020

So I have a message for you all. As you all know, we've had a rough year, but we've been slowly but steadily recovering. But, of course, something had gone wrong. Because Anurak shipped three pallets to the wrong customer last week, the board decided to update the entire loading dock's loading procedures.

It's just something we have to get used to, even if it wastes all our time in the process. Whenever we have an order ready, everyone in the loading dock needs to check with me for shipping first. Nothing will be allowed on the load car only after I have signed off on it. This new change will help prevent more careless mistakes.