

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation in Thailand is very chaotic and varied. Motorbikes and bicycles are the main mode of transport in rural areas and are generally used for short distances. While bus transportation dominates in Bangkok and for long distances.

AIR

Thailand has **six major international airports**: Suvarnabhumi and Don Muang in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Phuket, and Hat Yai. The vast majority of travellers fly into **Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi International Airport – one of Asia's biggest hubs** with hundreds of daily flights to worldwide destinations. Other international airports tend to cater to regional flights rather than long-haul.

Thailand has **23 domestic airports** for commercial flights in major cities around the country. They are Buriram, Hua Hin (Prachuap Khiri Khan), Khon Kaen, Krabi, Lampang, Mae Hong Son, Nakhon Phanom, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Nan, Narathiwat, Pai, Phitsanulok, Ranong, Roi Et, Sakon Nakhon, Samui, Surat Thani, Sukhothai, Trang, Trat, Ubon Ratchathani Udon Thani, and U-Taphao (Rayong).

Domestic flight services are now operated by five domestic carriers, which are, Thai Airways International (or THAI), Bangkok Airways, Air Asia, Orient Thai Airlines (One-Two-Go), Nok Air, and Nok Mini (SGA) Airlines. Of all the domestic airlines, Thai Airways International (TG) is the biggest.

RAILWAY

The State Railway of Thailand (SRT) offers train services throughout the country at very reasonable fares from Chiang Mai in the north all the way to the Malaysian border in the south.

The four main transit routes are the North, the Northeast, the East, and the South, radiating from the hub at **Bangkok Station or Hua Lamphong**.

There are four types of trains – ordinary, rapid, express and special express, and three classes of cars – 1st, 2nd and 3rd. For a long distance trip, the fare for the 2nd class is about the same as a private tour bus, but some say that the train is more comfortable, especially on overnight trips. However, travelling by train take a bit longer than by bus.

BUS

There are two main types of buses running to provinces around Thailand.

- ✚ **Non-air-conditioned buses** operated by the government which are the cheapest and slowest. These orange-coloured buses stop in every little town and pick up passengers at any point along the route.

- ✚ **Air-conditioned buses** painted in blue. This type, run by both the government and private companies, is faster and more comfortable. Yet the number of routes of air-con buses are less than those of the ordinary buses as they go to major cities only. Normally, there are two classes of air-con buses -- regular and 1st class; the latter have toilets.

For long routes like those going to Chiang Mai, Surat Thani and Phuket, there is another type called "**VIP**" or "**sleeper**" buses which have only 30 to 34 seats providing more leg room for each passenger. Generally, private companies offer more daily trips than the government's, though their fares are somewhat higher.

BOAT

Boats are an indispensable way of getting around many parts in Thailand. Traditionally, there are **long-tailed boat** – a long, thin wooden boats with the propeller at the end of a long tail stretching from the boat. Modernly, **air-conditioned speedboats**, sometimes ferries (departing every 30 minutes) are used to run from the Surat Thani to popular islands like Ko Samui and Ko Pha Ngan. However, buses, trains and airplanes are preferred for truly long-distance journeys as they are faster and safer.

CAR RENTAL

Car, Jeep & Van

Cars, jeeps and vans can be rented in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pattaya, Phuket and other tourist cities. The rental costs for cars and jeeps are from around 2,000 to 3,000 baht per day and vans from 2,500 to 3,500 baht. Typically, international rental companies charge a bit more than local companies, yet they offer a larger choice. A car can also be rented at travel agencies, many of which have branch offices in large- and medium-sized hotels. It is advisable to check whether a car is insured for liability before signing a rental contract.

Motorcycle

Like cars, motorcycles can be rented in tourist cities, except Bangkok as it is not convenient to use motorcycle here.

It has recently become a popular way to travel around Thailand by motorcycle, especially in the North. Rentals vary considerably from city to city. In major tourist spots like Chiang Mai and Phuket where there is an abundance of motorcycle rental shops, the costs are certainly much lower.

Anyway, whether you rent a motorcycle from a big rental company or a small shop, it is advisable to check the machine over thoroughly before you take it out. Before renting, make sure that an insurance is provided, though with an extra charge. And please note that both rider and passenger on a motor bike must wear a helmet.

Important!

- ✚ Unlike its neighbours (except Malaysia), Thai traffic moves on the left side of the road and Thai cars generally right-hand drive.

Everything is possible

- ✚ All official road directional signs are written in both Thai and English.
- ✚ Foreigners who wish to drive motor vehicles in Thailand need a valid International Driving License.
- ✚ Driving license and passport must be carried at all times when driving.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

Samlo

A samlo is a **three-wheeled taxi** which comes in two types -- motorised and nonmotorised. Motorised samlos or Tuk-Tuk can be found throughout the country while nonmotorised ones (or tricycle or rickshaws) are available in certain provincial towns. Both types of samlos are suitable for short trips only.

Taxi

Most taxis are new, spacious and, in addition to the traditional green-yellow and red-blue, they also come in funky colours like bright orange, red and even pink. Finding a taxi is not a hassle, especially around hotels, shopping malls and other tourist attractions.

The fare starts at **35 baht**, and stays there for the first two kilometres. Thereafter, the fare gradually works its way up with **2 baht** at a time (roughly per kilometre). A surcharge applies in traffic jams (**1.25 baht per metre** when moving under 6 km per hour). Typical taxi fares for going a few kilometres are around 50 baht. Communication can be a problem with the majority of taxi drivers as they often speak little English. Improvise, and be imaginative.

Songthaeo

Literally meaning two rows, this is a small pickup truck with two benches, each at one side of the truck seating several people. It is a public transport which operates fixed routes like buses, but normally runs a shorter distance or within the province. Songthaeo can also be chartered like a regular taxi.

Skytrain in Bangkok

The Bangkok Mass Transit System, commonly known as the BTS Skytrain, is easy, fast and cheap. Moreover, they run from 6.00am until midnight and you can avoid the crazy traffic in Bangkok. The downside is that it gets very crowded during the week, but it is much less crowded during the weekends. Furthermore, the Skytrain does not reach all of Bangkok.

Bangkok MRT

The Bangkok MRT underground – Fast and efficient, the Mass Rapid Transit network (MRT) serves 18 stations and stretches for 20 km in a horseshoe shape from Hua Lamphong in the South (near Chinatown) to Bang Sue in the north. Trains arrive every 5-7 minutes, and connect to the BTS Skytrain at Sukhumvit and Silom stations.