



Focus on THAILAND

School Program

“Thailand is a place of beauty both in the people and in the surroundings. I will always remember that month I spent studying Buddhism and meditation, JoJo, my little monkey, and the caves I explored along the coast of my ocean shore. But mostly I will never forget the people who took me in as their own child and accepted me as a Thai. As long as I have enough energy to move, I will forever be walking in Thailand's rich northern mountains and swimming in the south's turquoise seas. If anyone ever wants to go somewhere exotic, beautiful and friendly I suggest Thailand. If you go you'll understand why.”

Jessica, participant from the USA, 2001-02

Thailand, the “land of the free,” is also known as “the land of smiles.” Although Bangkok records the highest temperatures of any capital city in the world and is choked with smog and traffic—sometimes worsened by wandering elephants—Thailand is one of Asia’s most popular tourist destinations. Among the lures is a culture never modified by Western colonization, reflecting the diverse influences of China, Burma and the religion of Buddhism, which teaches hospitality and kindness. Equally irresistible are Thailand’s luxurious beaches, plentiful ancient ruins and glorious Buddhist temples. Bangkok alone has 400 of them, the most famous sheltering a 5½-ton statue of the Buddha made entirely of gold. Thais themselves are also a lure, gentle, welcoming and delighted whenever a foreigner shows interest in their history and traditions. However, they will not tolerate disrespect to their royal family or to religion, and they consider displays of anger or impatience to be shocking. Thai men and women seldom touch in public, even when married, and instead of shaking hands, Thais greet each other by placing palms together in front of their chests and bowing their heads. They strive always for respectful social harmony.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS Thailand has been in existence since 1962. It is now one of the 10 largest AFS partners and also offers Educator and Community Service programs, in addition to School-Based programs. More than 3,000 AFS volunteers in more than 77 chapters across the country work hard year-round, along with the Educational and Foreign Affairs Ministries, to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. During the school year, AFS Thailand hosts approximately 200 AFS students and 50 participants on the Community Service program, coming from as many as 30 countries.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Landing in Thailand

When you arrive in Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, you and your fellow AFSers will pass through customs and be met by AFS Thailand staff or volunteers who will take you to your first Thai orientation.

Arrival Orientation

The arrival orientation camp, organized by staff and run by volunteers from around the country, is held in English. It will give you a chance to relax, meet other AFSers from around the world and learn about AFS in Thailand, as well as about Thai culture and language.

The second night of your Arrival Orientation will include a welcome party, during which you will be invited to participate in a talent show with fellow AFSers from around the world, giving you a chance to share your talents and/or national costume. Please remember to bring any props, musical instruments or clothing that will be useful in this show. You will also meet your local AFS contact who will accompany you to your host family the following day. If you will live near Bangkok, you will be picked up by your host family at the orientation site.

Living in Thailand

Lifestyle and Family Living

Thais are generally respectful and reserved. They are also caring, warm-hearted and sensitive, and they find it difficult to say “no.” Extended Thai families are very close (which will give you a chance to visit your host relatives nearby) and are customarily patriarchal. Both parents usually work. Caring for the children and managing the household are generally the responsibility of the wife. The father is more involved with work outside the home.

Families are protective. Children ask permission from their parents before going out, and teenagers have less independence than their peers in Western countries. Young people normally do not drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes. If you smoke, you will probably be asked to do it outside the house, and it is not accepted while in school uniform. Families enjoy spending weekends together at home, where you will experience how Thai families are still bound by a colorful tradition with a long history.

Thai host families, like all AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family lives. As far north as the teak forest, as far south as the tropical beaches, passing through the farming central plains, your family could live anywhere around the country but most probably will reside in a regional capital or small town.

Dress and Appearance

Outside of school, teenagers dress similarly to those in western countries. A conservative approach to clothes is best. Thin cotton should be your wardrobe’s basic material due to high temperatures and the humid climate. A jacket or sweater may be useful in the cool season, especially in the mountains to the north and northeast. For students from many countries such as Germany, the U.S. or Australia, clothes are inexpensive to purchase.

Diet and Meals

Rice is the staple food of Thailand. It is often served with meat, fish, vegetable or egg dishes. Curry, peanut and pepper sauces are popular. Typical meats include pork and chicken. A wide variety of fruit is available year-round. To be safe, it is advisable to drink water only if it has been bottled or purified.

Most Thai families share the evening meal together. It is considered inappropriate for an individual to request foods that are not served or to prepare his or her own food. So it may be difficult if you are a strict vegan, although vegetarians find a number of options.

School

1◆School is one of the best places for you to meet people and make friends during your time in Thailand. Thai schools are the center of life for Thai youth, and their social lives revolve around school. Most schools are also the center of the community, and teachers are considered important respected.

2◆The school year runs from mid-May to mid-March and is divided into two terms separated by a four-week holiday in October. Students attend school Monday through Friday from about 8.00 a.m., when the national anthem is sung, until about 3:30 p.m. Normally there are seven or eight periods a day, each about 50 minutes long.

3◆ There are several types of schools where you may be placed, including government, private, single-sex, co-ed, demonstration (university-linked, using new methodologies), technical, vocational, teachers college and art college. Most AFSers attend the second-to-last year of public school. Students who are 18 and older may have to consider placement in a school other than a traditional academic high school.

Thai schools offer a wide variety of opportunities in addition to academic courses, including cultural subjects such as Thai language, dancing, sword fighting, music, cooking, arts, history, Buddhism and meditation. The school you attend and the courses you choose with the assistance of your advisor will depend on your age and interests as well as on the area hosting you. You may have classes with different year groups, depending on your courses. This is a great opportunity to meet more students.

AFS Thailand is school-based. As an AFS student, you will be expected to be a leader and set an example for the Thai students. Most of the volunteers are teachers and administrators. School also offers academic, sports and recreational clubs that meet both after school and for one period a week during school sessions. If there is not a club that interests you, you may be able to start your own!

4◆All schools require a uniform, which is provided, as well as textbooks and some other school activities. School rules require male students to keep their hair short.

5◆You can obtain a Certificate of Participation from AFS Thailand and a transcript from your school if you attend classes regularly and complete your coursework. It is not possible to obtain a high school diploma.

Teen Life

Movies and television are the most popular forms of leisure entertainment. Soccer, table tennis, badminton and volleyball are the favorite sports. As mentioned above, Thai schools are the center of the community, and a teenager's life revolves around them. AFS students are usually invited to join school trips, take part in English camps, community and regional events (e.g. festivals) and give presentations about their countries.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Thailand will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and

educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experiences.

The second orientation in Thailand will be held four to six weeks after your arrival. It is held regionally for four to five days. This will be followed by a four-to-five-day Enrichment Camp mid-way through your stay, held in a region to coincide with a local festival or holiday, such as the Candle Parade, the Loy Kratong or Song Kran Festival. Attendance at the camp is required of all AFSers, and your travel expenses will be reimbursed by AFS.

An optional week-long exchange to another part of Thailand is another possibility, where you will live with a host family and attend school. This is coordinated by your local advisor and, should you choose to participate, you would pay transportation costs. Some AFS local chapters may also organize special events, activities and trips for your enjoyment.

Last, but definitely not least, is the so-called End-of-Stay orientation. You will get together with other AFSers for a day before you return home. The End-of-Stay is about looking back at your exchange experience and sharing memories with other AFSers. It is also about thinking of the future.

There are many other activities that you can do in Thailand. They may be offered by AFS, by your school or by the community. Such possibilities include becoming a novice monk or nun and taking a meditation or massage course. You can also take part in community service activities and will be asked to do some presentations on your home country.

English camps are very popular in Thailand. They may be organized either by AFS or by your school. AFS students are invited to participate and, depending on your English skills, to be leaders. The camps are sponsored by a school, and the AFS national office arranges for AFSers to participate. You may have the opportunity to go to one or more English camps. They are a great way to make friends with Thai students.

Language

Thai is the official language with dialects spoken in different regions. In some cities, English is understood. From your arrival you will take language lessons daily, with a minimum of five hours per week; you will arrange your schedule with your support person. This may become less frequent as you gain proficiency in the language. Support persons and schools are given a copy of "Essential Thai" that they use as a basis for teaching. AFS Thailand will provide you with some material prior to departure on language, culture and Thai life.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Thailand, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS Thailand. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends. Any such travel, which cannot exceed two weeks during school vacations, requires prior approval by AFS in your host country as well as in your home country.

Spending Money

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to join, but they may pay for some of your personal activities. When you do things with your friends or alone, such as going to a movie or taking special lessons, the expenses are your responsibility.

Thai young people do not customarily carry as much money as their peers do in some other countries. AFS recommends that you bring about US\$100 per month (in traveler's checks or using a credit card with a CIRRUS link), which is more than enough for spending money. Spending more than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them.

Safety and Support

Like your country, Thailand can be a safe place if you are aware of the potential dangers and act accordingly. Thailand is a country that cares deeply for the welfare of its children. Host families, as well as AFS Thailand, educate students to enable them to have a safe and rewarding experience.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Thai. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Thailand may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Thailand (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents.

Program Prices

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training,

support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

Thailand is located in southeast Asia and is surrounded by Myanmar (Burma) to the west and Laos and Cambodia to the north and east. It is about the size of Spain. It has a long peninsula that juts down to the south separating the Bay of Bengal from the Gulf of Thailand. Parts of Malaysia and Singapore occupy the southern tip of the peninsula. Drained by a wide network of rivers and canals, Thailand's four regions are: the central plain, the northeast Korat Plateau, the mountainous north and the rain-forested south.

The climate is tropical monsoon and can be very humid. Temperatures range from 19°C (67°F) to 38°C (100°F). There are three seasons: hot (March to May), rainy (June to October), and cool (November to February). In general, rainfall is heaviest in the south, lightest in the northeast.

Population

The population of Thailand is approximately 64 million. About 20% of the population lives in Bangkok, the capital. Four regional language groups make up the core Thai population: Central Thai (32%); Thai-Lao (30%); Northern Thai (17%); and Southern Thai (5%). The largest minority groups are Chinese, Malay and various Hill Tribes.

Government

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy that has ruled since 1932. The country has 76 provinces. The government is run by a coalition of elected civilian political parties in which decision-making about affairs of state rests with the prime minister.

Religion

Ninety-five percent of the population is Buddhist, four percent are Muslim, and one percent is Christian or other. Thai people are very accepting of different religious beliefs and, in fact, religious freedom is guaranteed under the constitution.

Launching Your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving home have the best experiences. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key Thai words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Thailand, we suggest that you make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Thailand and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Thailand. This person can be an excellent resource regarding living as a Thai. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS Thailand will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information while you are still at home.

Thai people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, now is the time. Please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

Curiously Thai

✦ King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX) has the longest tenure of any head of state. He has been King of Thailand since June 9, 1946.

✦ Thailand is called the “the land of smiles.”

✦ Among other activities offered in Thailand, you may be able to ride an elephant.

✦ Thailand is the only country of Southeast Asia never to have been colonized by a western nation.

How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student age (upon arrival)	16y to 18y 6m	
Country data	<hr/>	
	Size	513,251 sq. km. 318,215 sq. mi.
	Population	64,265,276
	Official language	Thai
	Government	Constitutional monarchy
Currency	Baht, divided into 100 satang	
Useful websites	http://sunsite.au.ac.th/thailand http://tourismthailand.org/ http://www.tat.or.th/ www.phukettourism.org http://www.thailandguidebook.com/ To learn Thai language http://www.learningthai.com/ http://www.thai-language.com/ http://thaiarc.tu.ac.th/host/thaiarc/thai/introth.htm	
AFS Thailand website	http://www.afsthailand.org	

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>