

THAILAND

“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 sojourner 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.

Community Service Program

AFS’s Community Service program gives you the opportunity to share in and contribute to the life of a community in Thailand by living and working alongside its members in a community-based service organization. At the organization, you will be asked to pitch in and offer assistance in whatever capacity might be needed and to share the knowledge and experience you have gained from your home culture in the process. No one expects you to be an expert with all the answers to local problems or the ability to change local conditions. Rather, you are expected to be a willing participant in a process of mutual discovery. This experience will present you with innumerable learning opportunities both personally and professionally.

Worldwide, AFS Community Service program participants contribute their talents and energies to a variety of social programs that range from protecting the environment to teaching children or adults, from assisting the elderly and the disabled to defending human rights, from enhancing public health to helping local businesses become established.

Past participants in Thailand have worked as assistants at rural hospitals, regional zoos and marine research facilities, as well as working to forestall social problems in secondary schools, to help the blind and mentally handicapped and to empower women. However, all specifics—including assignments, orientations, logistics and activities—vary depending on the program cycle.

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 school-based programs in addition to Community Service 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. Each year, AFS Thailand hosts approximately 200 AFS students and 50 Community Service participants, 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.

Orientations

Upon arrival in Bangkok, you will be met by members of AFS Thailand's staff who will escort you to an arrival orientation in a Bangkok suburb that explores Thai culture and includes language instruction for as long as a week. This orientation is conducted in English. Afterward, you will travel by train, bus or car to meet your host family.

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Thailand will provide you with several others. AFS orientations offer participants a chance to meet for several days and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions also provide language training as well as 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 people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experiences while preparing them to handle their community service assignments.

Living in Thailand

Living arrangements

Some participants in AFS Community Service programs live with local families, sharing their daily lives, their meals and perhaps a host sibling's bedroom. Other participants live where their community service organization conducts its business. Still others live in rooms provided elsewhere by their local service organizations. In general, smoking is not acceptable in host families or in workplaces.

Typical day

Normal working hours start at 8.30 a.m. and finish at 4.30 p.m. Lunch is usually from noon to 1.00 p.m. Workers are expected to arrive before working hours begin. Teachers, for example, usually get to school 30 minutes before the school starts. The daily routine depends mainly on the participant's worksite. In schools, participants assist other staff in the Foreign Language Department to conduct English classes and other language activities, such as English Club and English Camps. In Orphanage Home, participants help take care of children while assisting other staff where there is a need. At the Zoo, participants help feed the animals while learning how to care for them properly. At Magic Eyes, participants help conduct classes in language and freshwater environment for the youth participating in the program on a rice barge. One basic purpose at all work sites is to have participants share their cultures and languages with co-workers and other people in their communities.

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 has been bottled or purified. Thai families generally share their evening meal together. It is considered inappropriate for participants living with host families to request foods that are not served or to prepare their own food. It may be difficult if to place you if you are a strict vegan, although vegetarians find a number of options.

Dress and Appearance

Appearance matters more in Thailand than in many other countries. It is not unusual for people, even strangers, to comment about your appearance. You will be expected to wear neat, clean, pressed clothes and have neatly groomed hair at all times at work sites. (If a worksite has special

dress code requirements, you will be notified of the specifics). For men, non-denim pants are worn with dress shirts and a tie for school-wear. Jeans and T-shirts are acceptable after working hours. It is inappropriate for men to wear earrings, long hair, beards or moustaches. A pair of "good" comfortable shoes will be needed for school or work site. Loafer-type shoes are acceptable, as they are easy to slip on and off. For women, modest, sleeved dresses and blouses and modest skirts are appropriate to wear during working hours. Pants, slacks and shorts cannot be worn in schools. T-shirts, pants, jeans or long shorts are acceptable after working hours. You will need shoes (pumps or nice looking sandals with back-straps) for school year. Skirts and dresses should be longer than knee length. Flip-flops or thongs are not considered appropriate for school or work site.

Activities

Participants are occasionally expected to help out in other community activities.

Health Precautions

AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Thailand (which you can get from your government or find easily on the Internet) with your doctor at home, 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.

Safety and Support

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.

Travel

AFS's Community Service programs allow participants to travel on their own through their host countries, typically for a week or more, to explore and absorb each country's cultural diversity.

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 in your region 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. It is your responsibility to obtain your visa and pay the fees. However, AFS will let you know how to proceed and will provide you with the documents you need to apply for the visa.

Program Prices

All participants are required to pay participation fee and do a mandatory fundraising. To get further information, please visit our website www.afscanada.org or contact us.

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 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 62 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.

Language

Thai is the official language with dialects spoken in different regions. In some cities, English is understood.

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 4% are Muslim and 1% 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 if you prepare prior to leaving, you will have the best experience. Because orientations in Thailand are conducted in English, make every effort to improve your English language skills before departure. Then, to familiarize yourself with life in Thailand, visit your local library or search the Internet. AFS International's website, AFS.org, provides links to websites for each participating country.

Although every participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Thailand. This veteran will be an excellent resource regarding living and working there. If you do not know a veteran, please contact your local AFS volunteer or AFS Interculture Canada office. In addition, AFS will provide you with essential information about your host country to prepare you for immersion in a new and exciting culture.

Finally, Thais will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised how much they already know about your country's history and politics. Therefore, you will find it helpful to be informed about current events in your home community and country.

How to Apply?

You first have to fill out the Preliminary Application form that you can find on our website at www.afscanada.org. If you don't have access to Internet, call us at (514) 288-3282 or 1-800-361-7248 and we will send you the document by mail.

Quick Facts

Country data	Size	513,251 kmq (318,215 sq.mi)
	Population	63,583,000
	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	