



## Thailand 2012 Crime and Safety Report: Chiang Mai

Stolen items; Theft; Drug Trafficking; Fraud; Financial Security; Information Security; Transportation Security; Separatist violence; Riots/Civil Unrest; Religious Terrorism; Floods; Bribery; Improvised Explosive Device

East Asia & Pacific > Thailand > Bangkok; East Asia & Pacific > Thailand > Chiang Mai

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### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

#### Crime Threats

Chiang Mai is considered “low-threat” overall for crime, and most travelers in Thailand feel relatively safe; however, pick-pocketing and petty crimes occur. Violent crimes such as armed robbery, kidnappings, and murder against Westerners or tourists remain relatively rare. Drug use is a continuing problem, particularly the increasing use of methamphetamine and intravenous drugs.

Petty theft, purse snatching, and pick-pocketing are most common in the areas frequented by foreigners such as major hotels, tourist sites, and public parks. Chiang Mai’s Walking Street and Night Bazaar are a particular focus for petty criminals, who are aware that these areas are frequented by tourists who carry cash, cameras, cell phones, passports, and other valuables. Thailand is considered “high-threat” for credit card and ATM card fraud, and credit and ATM cards should only be used inside well-established, reputable hotels, restaurants, banks, and other businesses.

Visitors/residents should never leave possessions unattended, particularly in public areas such as airports, parks, restaurants, hotel lobbies, etc. Thefts of briefcases, luggage, laptop computers, and other items can occur when the owner’s attention is momentarily diverted.

In general, the safety and security of guest rooms in quality hotels is adequate. Valuables and important documents (passport, etc.) should be kept inside a safe in the room (provided by many of the better hotels) or in a safety deposit box at the front desk. If on guided tours, secure your personal bags, and, if possible, do not leave them on the tour bus/boat. If you must leave the bags, remove any valuables. There have been a number of incidents involving tourists leaving their bags on buses/boats and, upon their return, finding that their bags were



stolen or rifled through for valuables.

Individuals planning to lease homes or apartments within Chiang Mai are advised to acquire properties properly outfitted with crime prevention devices, especially against burglaries. While relatively rare, residential burglaries do occur in areas where Westerners live. In 2011, several burglaries were reported in the Lanna Tara residential compound, where a significant number of Consulate families and other expatriates live.

Additionally, individuals planning to hire domestic help should screen candidates carefully. Our office is aware of isolated instances of domestic help stealing cash or valuables from their employers.

## Road Safety

Traffic moves on the left, and right-hand drive vehicles are recommended for safety purposes. Driving can be dangerous due to careless drivers, and extreme caution should be exercised. (News reports from early January 2011 indicate that during the six days surrounding New Year's Day, more than 300 traffic fatalities were reported throughout Thailand, with Chiang Mai having the greatest number of fatalities of any province). Overall, the road infrastructure in and around Chiang Mai is adequate to good; however, traffic laws in Chiang Mai are not strictly enforced, and driving rules are widely ignored. Traffic hazards include: drivers exceeding the speed limit, drivers under the influence of alcohol, red-light-running, motorcycles and other vehicles changing lanes unexpectedly, motorcycles driving the wrong way in traffic, heavily-laden motorcycles and trucks, underage/unlicensed drivers, etc.

Pedestrians in Chiang Mai face hazards as well; many areas lack sidewalks, and pedestrians should not expect drivers to grant them the right of way, even in marked crosswalks. When crossing streets, pedestrians should be cautious for vehicles running red lights or driving the wrong way in traffic.

Motorcycle accidents are particularly common and serious in nature since motorcyclists generally have less training than car/truck drivers. The majority of traffic fatalities involve motorcycles. If planning to ride a motorcycle, in accordance with local law, a helmet must be worn.

## Political Violence

### Historical Perspective



The political environment remains turbulent. Since 2006, the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD, also known as “Red Shirts”) has led large political protests and conducted sporadic acts of violence throughout the country, notably in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. Between March and May 2010, political protests throughout Thailand resulted in the deaths of at least 91 people and injuries to over 260 people, including two U.S. citizens. Responding to the violent protests in Bangkok, the Royal Thai government imposed a curfew and temporarily closed several hotels and stores. After the protests ended in May 2010, there were numerous incidents of explosive attacks, including several isolated grenade and arson attacks, in and around Bangkok and Chiang Mai. Several explosive devices were discovered in public places in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, including near a major shopping center, a school, a bus stop, and government buildings. These incidents appear to have been motivated by domestic politics and have no apparent link to international terrorism. Americans and other foreigners have not been specifically targeted. While this spate of explosive incidents appears to have subsided, visitors should remain vigilant and cautious when transiting public areas, as future explosive device attacks cannot be ruled out. Immediately report unattended or suspicious items to local law enforcement.

The Department of State advises all U.S. citizens residing in or traveling to Thailand to monitor events closely, to avoid any large public gatherings, and to exercise discretion when traveling. All demonstrations are unpredictable, and any demonstration can turn violent without warning. For this reason, we encourage you to monitor local media for announcements of possible demonstrations and to avoid the areas where demonstrations might occur. If a demonstration is expected to pass near U.S. Embassy or Consulate facilities, Embassy and Consulate entrances and functions may be restricted.

The far south of Thailand has been experiencing almost daily incidents of criminally and politically motivated violence for several years, including incidents attributed to armed local separatist groups. Although the separatist groups have focused primarily on Thai government interests in the southern provinces, some of the recent violence has targeted public and commercial areas, including areas where foreigners may congregate. You should be aware that Thai authorities have on occasion instituted special security measures, such as curfews, military patrols, or random searches of train passengers, in affected areas.

The Thai/Burma border is the site of on-going conflicts between the Burmese army and armed opposition groups as well as clashes between Thai security forces and armed drug traffickers. Pirates, bandits, and drug traffickers operate in these border areas. There remains a possibility of significant flare-ups of military activity on the Burmese side of the border that could spill over into adjacent areas of northern Thailand. You should travel off-road in undeveloped areas only with local guides who are familiar with the area. Border closings and



re-openings occur frequently, and if you are considering traveling into Burma, you should be aware that in the event of a border closure you may not be able to re-enter Thailand.

### Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime

The State Department is concerned that there is a continued risk of terrorism in Southeast Asia, including in Thailand. U.S. citizens should exercise caution, especially in locations where Westerners congregate, such as clubs, discos, bars, restaurants, hotels, places of worship, schools, outdoor recreation venues, tourist areas, beach resorts, and other places frequented by foreigners. Thailand has experienced endemic violence in the deep south as a result of the ethnic Malay Muslim separatist insurgency, and drug trafficking organizations and other organized criminal groups have also perpetrated acts of violence within the country. Special caution should be used when traveling near the border regions.

### International Terrorism or Transnational Terrorism

Persons known to be connected with transnational terrorist organizations have been known to transit and reside in Thailand. Thailand's borders are relatively porous, making it easy for terrorists and other criminal elements to enter the country without attracting attention. In 2004, senior Jemaah Islamiyah/al-Qai'da operative Hambali was captured just north of Bangkok. In January 2012, U.S. citizens were alerted by the Embassy in Bangkok that "foreign terrorists may be currently looking to conduct attacks against tourist areas in Bangkok in the near future. U.S. citizens are urged to exercise caution when visiting public areas where large groups of Western tourists gather in Bangkok." Although international terrorist organizations have not recently conducted operations against targets in Thailand, soft target vulnerabilities exist throughout the country that could be exploited by these groups if they chose to do so.

### Civil Unrest

Political tension has simmered since the military coup of 2006. March-May 2010 was marked by the deadliest outbreak of political violence in nearly two decades, as supporters of ousted former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra occupied portions of downtown Bangkok, leading to bloody clashes with security forces that left nearly 100 people dead. Although Bangkok was hardest hit, Chiang Mai (Thaksin's hometown and base of political support) was not immune. During the same period, Chiang Mai experienced more than a dozen bombings and grenade attacks and several sizeable political demonstrations, culminating with a mob attacking the Provincial Governor's residential compound in May 2010 and setting fire to several buildings and fire trucks.



Following successful nationwide elections in July 2011, political violence has subsided substantially; however, demonstrations still do occur on a periodic basis. Most of these demonstrations are intended to be peaceful and generally do not target Americans or other foreigners; however, you are advised to give them a wide berth, as even peaceful demonstrations can turn confrontational on short notice.

### **Post-Specific Concerns**

#### **Environmental Hazards**

New residents and visitors should be aware of massive street flooding that commonly occurs in many of the cities during the rainy season. Many city streets are not equipped with the proper sewage infrastructure needed to drain the large amount of seasonal rain that falls in a very short amount of time. This inordinate amount of rainfall often overwhelms the capacity of the existing infrastructure, causing flooding that makes navigating the streets difficult.

#### **Police Response**

In the event of an emergency, the police can be contacted by dialing 191 (Thailand's equivalent of 911) from a local telephone, though few of the 191 operators speak English. Tourist Police can be contacted by dialing 1155, and Tourist Police are generally either bilingual or accompanied by bilingual auxiliaries. Foreigners who are the victims of petty thefts, frauds, or other crimes should contact the Tourist Police.

If you are involved in a traffic accident, altercation, or other situation that draws a crowd, leave the immediate area and contact the police.

Be aware that police are often under-funded and lack training in a number of areas. While the overall situation is gradually improving, some police have been openly solicitous of compensation, ostensibly to support local police efforts or to facilitate an investigation of a crime.

#### **Medical Emergencies**

In Chiang Mai, medical facilities for routine, long-term, and emergency health care are generally adequate. Smaller towns and outlying areas may lack the facilities, expertise, and specialist medical personnel of major metropolitan areas.



## Contact Information for Local Clinics or Hospitals

Chiang Mai Ram Hospital: 053-224-861

Lanna Hospital: 053-999-777

McCormick Hospital: 053-921-777

Maharaj Nakorn Chiang Mai Hospital: 053-947-000

## Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Try to minimize any potential losses ahead of time. When going out, take only what is needed. If confronted by a robber, quickly give up whatever is demanded, leave the immediate area, and contact the police. Protect identity documents and leave most valuables (including cash) in a safe place. If carrying a bag, purse, or backpack, carry it in a manner that would allow it to be released quickly and easily in an emergency.

When out on the street, be as alert as possible to the surroundings. Watch out for distractions such as kids surrounding tourists to sell something and then picking their pockets, or prostitutes trying to solicit sex and grabbing a potential customer by the arm, but in reality stealing their watch. When traveling at night, it is best to go with a friend. Do not take cyclos/pedicabs at night.

Watch out for unattended drinks in bars; on a few occasions, drinks have been altered in order to incapacitate a potential victim.

Avoid unorganized gatherings such as street races or demonstrations.

It is illegal for foreigners to work without a work permit. This includes unpaid work, volunteer work (even for charitable causes), and work in exchange for room and board. If you work without a work permit, you are subject to arrest, fine, and deportation. Before traveling for work -- whether or not you receive compensation -- you should check with the Royal Thai Embassy to ensure that your plans are consistent with Thai law.

Small joint ventures formed by U.S. citizens in conjunction with Thai partners have occasionally reported threats from their Thai partners or employees if the business relationship sours. Some foreign business people have faced threats, vandalism, and harassment in connection with their business dealings, though only a few cases of actual physical harm have been reported.



## Areas to Avoid

The U.S. Embassy prohibits U.S. Embassy personnel from traveling to the far south of Thailand -- Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala, and Songkhla provinces, including the town of Hat Yai -- without prior mission approval, and Embassy personnel may go there only on mission-essential travel. The Department of State urges Americans to defer non-emergency travel to these areas. If you must travel to these areas, you should exercise special caution and remain vigilant with regard to their personal security.

We recommend that you defer travel along the Thai-Cambodian border in the area of the Preah Vihear temple because of a border dispute. Soldiers from the two countries have been stationed along the border since July 2008 and have exchanged gunfire on several occasions. Until the situation has been resolved, you should exercise extreme caution if you must travel to areas along the Thai-Cambodian border where troop activities are reported.

In light of the continuing unsettled situation along the Thai border with Burma and the possibility of frequent closings to all traffic, the Department of State recommends that you exercise caution when traveling in remote or rural areas adjacent to the Burma border.

## Further Information

(If calling from outside of Thailand, use country code "66" and drop the leading "0" (zero) from the numbers below).

U.S. Consulate General Chiang Mai switchboard: 053-107-700  
Regional Security Officer: 053-107-784; RSOChiangMai@state.gov  
After-hours Duty Officer: 081-881-1878  
Embassy Bangkok switchboard: 02-205-4000  
Embassy Bangkok after-hours Duty Officer: 02-205-4108

## OSAC Country Council

The Thailand OSAC Country Council is part of the American Chamber of Commerce based in Bangkok. The Council meets on a monthly basis and can be contacted through the Chamber of Commerce at 66-2-254-1041 or <http://www.amchamthailand.com>.