

ninth monarch in the 200-year Chakri Dynasty and carries the title of Rama IX. Since 1971, Thailand's government has experienced numerous changes, but from 1979, there has been a period of considerable stability. The country has been ruled by a popularly elected coalition government under the leadership of a prime minister who is appointed by the king.

The People

Thailand's population numbers about 52 million with an average annual growth rate of 1.9 per cent. Approximately 80 per cent of the population is Thai, 10 per cent Chinese (the majority of whom are almost fully assimilated), 3 per cent Malay, and 7 per cent other ethnic groups such as Laotian, Vietnamese, and Cambodian.

The predominant religion is Buddhism. The Thai religious tradition, which is a mixture of Theravada Buddhism, Hinduism, and Animism, is practised by 90 per cent of the population. There is also a Muslim minority in the southern region.

The national language is Thai, a complex five-tone language, but English is widely used in government and commercial circles. Most official documents and forms are in Thai which has its own distinctive script based on Sanscrit. Canadian business people may have to engage Thai associates for assistance in dealing with paperwork, making telephone calls, and locating addresses.

Local Customs

It is useful for visitors to Thailand to be aware of the following Thai social and cultural conventions so as to avoid embarrassing *faux pas*. However, it might be noted that the Thais are an exceptionally tolerant and generous people, and will readily forgive minor, unintentional indiscretions.

Thai people, at all levels in society, display and sincerely hold a high degree of respect for religion and the monarchy. Indeed, it would be viewed as highly insulting if negative comments were made against Thailand's religious and monarchical institutions.

Respect for Buddha's teachings, the core of Buddhism, requires respect for all the visible manifestations of the religion, but particularly for monks, Buddha images, and temples.