
I. HISTORY, CUSTOMS AND BUSINESS PRACTICE

The Kingdom of Thailand, formerly Siam, has an area of 513 115 km². Occupying a strategic position in the centre of the Southeast Asian peninsula, Thailand borders Kampuchea (Cambodia) to the southeast, Laos to the east and north, Burma to the north and west, and Malaysia to the south. Thailand's coastline borders the Gulf of Thailand to the east and the Andaman Sea to the west.

Bangkok, known in Thai as Krung Thep, and its sister city, Thon Buri, are Thailand's government, business and commercial centres. Situated 32 km inland on the Chao Phraya River, Bangkok is Thailand's major port. Other urban centres include Chiang Mai, a northern city with 104 910 inhabitants; Khorat (Nakhon Ratchasima), a city of 89 261 in central Thailand; and the southern cities of Hat Yai (108 389) and Songkhla (77 916).

History and Government

The earliest Thais migrated into the northern part of the country from southern China during the fifth to seventh centuries A.D. Several independent kingdoms emerged, but by the thirteenth century, a unified state, the Kingdom of Sukhothai, predominated establishing the origins of Thailand. Beginning in the sixteenth century, Western seafarers established contact with Thailand which then maintained relations with the Western nations until 1668 when the kingdom closed its borders to foreigners. Thailand alone among Southeast Asian countries escaped colonization.

Thailand's isolationist policy was eliminated in the early nineteenth century and by the mid-1880s modern Western ideas were being introduced into the country by the Thai kings. In 1932 a peaceful revolution established the country as a constitutional monarchy. In recent years the country has been governed alternately by military and civilian leaders.

The reigning monarch of the Kingdom of Thailand is King Bhumibol Adulyadej, crowned in 1950. He is the