



# Thailand - Culture Smart!: The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture

*Roger Jones*

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For many outsiders Thailand still conjures up images of the East at its most mysterious and enchanting – a view largely formed by Hollywood films like *The King and I*. Never conquered by foreigners, this proud and ancient land has been shaped by Buddhism, the monarchy, and the military. Today it is a representative democracy with a populist female prime minister, and is ranked among the tiger economies of Southeast Asia. It is a manufacturing powerhouse, the world's largest rice exporter, and a tourist paradise that welcomes 22 million visitors a year to its beach resorts and its vibrant capital, Bangkok.

Yet despite the veneer of Western modernity, the country and its people remain an enigma for many visitors, smiling and inscrutable. It conceals a unique system of personal values and attitudes, developed over centuries. You may find that Thais react to you in surprising and unexpected ways, coming as they do from a culture based on respect, status, self-control, non-confrontation, and harmony. They are also naturally generous and have a great love of fun. Thais put a great deal of effort into social skills in order to maintain social harmony, and one of their most potent weapons is the smile that puts people at ease and helps to defuse a difficult situation.

This new, updated edition of *Culture Smart! Thailand* describes how the Thai people view the world and themselves. It examines the impact of religious beliefs and history on their lives, as well as the continuing importance of the monarchy. It looks at recent social and political developments, including the current tensions in the south. Above all, it helps visitors to become more culturally aware and so better able to interact successfully with the locals. Thailand's charm lies in being different, and visitors who make an effort to understand the differences will find their stay in "The Land of Smiles" a richly rewarding experience.

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