TRAVEL

Thailand: The Yogi's Guide — Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Koh Phangan

Temples, hermit exercises, meditation in the north, the Gulf islands and the practical facts, checked and dated



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YOGIDE

Free sample

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Before you begin

Thailand is not the birthplace of yoga, and this guide will not pretend otherwise. Its religion is Theravada Buddhism; its bodily tradition is the ruesi dat ton, the self-stretching of the hermits, cast in statues at Wat Pho; its healing art is nuad Thai, traditional Thai massage, inscribed by UNESCO in 2019. And yet a yogi who walks through Bangkok, Chiang Mai and the islands of the Gulf meets India at every step: in a hermit whose title comes from the Sanskrit ṛṣi, in a temple named after the Bodhi tree of Bodh Gaya, in a spire named after Aruṇa, the god of dawn, in Brahmin priests who still serve the royal court, in a river festival that thanks a water goddess called Khongkha, the Thai form of Gaṅgā.

Thailand also hosts many yoga retreats and teacher trainings, from Chiang Mai in the north to Koh Phangan in the Gulf. Most of these are modern and international. This guide is for the person who wants to practise in Thailand without confusing the two worlds: who will take a class in the morning and, in the afternoon, enter a temple knowing what it is and how to behave there.

It is not a list of retreats. You will find no ranking, no review and no recommendation of any school, retreat centre or teacher. It is built on three promises.

First, practical facts are checked and dated. Visa rules, timetables, fares, seasons and health advice change. Every practical fact here was checked online on **21 October 2026** against the most official source we could find, listed in the last chapter. Where sources disagree, we say so. Where we could not verify something, we left it out and tell you where to ask.

Second, no invented experiences. No testimonials, no "when I was in Chiang Mai" stories, no reviews. A legend is called a legend.

Third, the sacred is treated as sacred. Thai temples are living places of a living religion. This guide explains the customs so you can be present without causing offence.

> **This guide informs; it does not replace official advice.**
>
> Read your own government's travel advice for Thailand before and during your trip, check the rules of entry yourself, and see a travel health professional. Emergency numbers in Thailand, according to the UK FCDO (read on 21 October 2026): **police 191, ambulance 1669, fire 199, tourist police 1155**.

How to read the words in this book

Thai has its own script and a tonal pronunciation. We write Thai words in the common Latin spellings you will see on signs (wat, ruesi, nuad). Sanskrit words appear in Devanagari with IAST transliteration: ā, ī, ū are long; ṛ is a short "ri"; ś and ṣ are two kinds of "sh"; ṃ is a nasal hum. Pali, the language of the Theravada scriptures, is close to Sanskrit: vipassanā in Pali is vipaśyanā (विपश्यना) in Sanskrit.

How to use this book

Still choosing dates? Read Chapter 7 first: the Gulf islands and the rest of the country do not share the same rainy season. Ticket booked? Chapters 9 to 11 cover entry, transport and safety. Already there? Chapters 2 to 6 explain what you are walking past; Chapters 15 and 16 give checklists and phrases.

Chapter 1. Thailand and India: what travelled east

A Buddhist country with Indian roots

Thailand's majority religion is Theravada Buddhism, the "teaching of the elders", whose scriptures are written in Pali. The Buddha was born, taught and died in the Gangetic plain of India; the Thai name of Bangkok's Wat Pho comes from its older name Wat Photaram, "monastery of the Bodhi tree", which refers to the tree in **Bodh Gaya** under which the Buddha is believed to have attained awakening (Wikipedia, "Wat Pho"). If you have been to Bodh Gaya, you will hear its echo here.

Hindu gods in a Buddhist kingdom

Brahmanical India also travelled. Bangkok's **Devasathan**, near Wat Suthat, is described as the official centre of Hinduism in Thailand and the home of the Court Brahmins, said to descend from a lineage of priests from Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu; it was founded in 1784 by King Rama I (Wikipedia, "Devasathan"). The **Erawan Shrine** houses Phra Phrom, the Thai form of Brahmā (Wikipedia, "Erawan Shrine"). **Wat Arun**, the Temple of Dawn, takes its name from Aruṇa, the personified rays of the rising sun (Wikipedia, "Wat Arun"). The murals of the **Wat Phra Kaew** galleries tell the whole Ramakien, Thailand's national epic, a Thai version of the Rāmāyaṇa (Wikipedia, "Wat Phra Kaew", "Ramakien").

The ṛṣi becomes the ruesi

For a yogi, the hermit is the most familiar figure in Thailand. The Thai ruesi is the Sanskrit ṛṣi (ऋषि), the seer or sage of the Vedas, who in Thailand became the forest hermit, master of medicine and of bodily exercises. Chapter 3 tells how his exercises were cast in metal in Bangkok.

What Thailand is not

Thailand does not have an Indian yoga lineage: no line of hatha yoga teachers going back to the Nāth yogis, no Patañjali commentary tradition. The yoga taught in most Thai retreats arrived in the late twentieth century with international teachers. That is not a criticism: it simply tells you what to look for. If you want the source, read our pages on hatha yoga and on Rishikesh; if you want Thailand, look for what is Thai.

End of the sample

Thank you for reading this far. We hope these first pages already help your practice, and that they show how the rest of the book is built: clear steps, texts quoted with their source, nothing invented.

The full book has 33 pages.

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