How to Work Abroad in Thailand

Relocating to this popular expat destination just might be the career move you’re looking for.

While finding the perfect job in Thailand can be a challenge, there are many opportunities in the country. A career change is likely in your future if you want to relocate there, but many expats are making that choice. Once they have settled into their new life, many people discover that working in Thailand can be rewarding, while offering a more relaxed way of life.

It’s not as simple as getting the new job and showing up for work. There are customs and cultural differences that expats should be aware of.

Find that Job

One of the best options of working is to teach English. People with an education degree might make a salary comparable to what they’d make at their home country, but even inexperienced teachers can make a salary in the range of what Thai people make.

Teaching also offers benefits beyond the paycheck. It gives expats the chance to dive into the culture of Thailand, and to interact with Thai people directly.

Another solid option is working in the hotel industry. People from throughout the world with experience in hospitality can be found working in Thailand resorts. Chefs, managers, guest relations employees, and musicians have an excellent chance of getting work. If you’re looking for a life of leisure, keep in mind that working in a hotel in Thailand is as pressure-filled as working in any other bustling hotel. Another option is the food service industry, but the wages are low.

Running a business is feasible, but doing business in Thailand can involve a lot of red tape, and you’ll need the services of a lawyer to actually make that happen.

Another factor to consider is that getting a visa in Thailand tends to be complicated. Foreigners must obtain a work permit in order to legally work in Thailand. The visa will include your job, occupation or job description, and the company you are working for. A work visa is needed no matter what visa an expat may have. Foreigners need an initial visa in order to secure a work permit, which is done through the Ministry of Labor and takes about seven days to obtain. In order to secure a work visa, you will need to submit a 2-inch photo, medical certificate, passport, letter of employment, certificate of degree and your Thailand address.
Business Customs in Thailand

If you do find yourself doing business in Thailand, remember that while the country is very pro-business, many people at different levels get involved with the decision-making process. Networking is important, as you’ll gain more respect if you make powerful connections.

Initial meetings often are pleasant and generally don’t result in deals because it’s considered impolite to discuss business with someone before getting to know him or her. Education is held in high regard, especially when people have degrees from respected universities. You’ll notice that Thai people often include their degrees on their business cards.

Negotiations can take a long time. It’s important to know that the Thai people separate their business life from their home life, and family comes first. If you’re giving an answer someone doesn’t want to hear, be gentle, bluntness is considered impolite.

Language in Thailand

Although the Thai language is spoken throughout the country, English is widely spoken in Thailand, especially in Bangkok and major tourist destinations. Thailand also draws visitors from Europe and other Asian countries, so many languages can be heard to different degrees. As a result, you should be fine speaking English during any business meetings, but learning a few key Thai phrases will be helpful and polite.

Learning Thai itself can be difficult, but the friendly Thai people are usually willing to help expats in Thailand learn a few key words. Truly learning the language, however, is a big challenge as it uses five different tones, with each tone altering the meanings of words. Learning to read Thai can be just as tricky as speaking it, but road signs are in both Thai and English and many tourist destinations and restaurants offer written materials in various languages.

Learn the Wai Greeting

One bit of non-verbal communication any expat in Thailand should know is the “wai” greeting. It’s a show of respect and is done by pressing your palms near your chest and bowing. Greeting people with the wai will help you gain respect from Thai people.

The higher your hands are during a wai greeting, the more respect you are showing. Fingers might be raised by some as high as the nose, but fingertips never should be higher than eye level. Do not use the wai when meeting servants, street vendors, or children. Never return a wai to a servant or child, just nod and smile. It’s also worth knowing that monks do not return wai greetings.

While some Thai people will shake hands, they don’t do it with a lot of enthusiasm. Make sure not to kiss people on the cheek, European style. This is off-putting to people from Thai, especially when men do this to a woman who isn’t their wife or girlfriend.
There’s a lot more to discover about Thailand, find out more by checking out the Thailand risk assessment country guide, which will help you to learn about health, safety and security in Thailand.