



# Andaman Discoveries

Become a part of the story...

## Pre-Departure Information Booklet



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## 1. Introduction

We have created this information booklet to help you preparing your trip and to make the most of your time while in Thailand. You're certain to have many questions before arriving with us. This booklet should answer those questions and provide a comprehensive guide to Thailand and the village(s) you will visit.

We have International and local staff in Thailand who are available to answer any questions by email or phone. Our comprehensive website may also help.

The beauty of the villages in which we work and assist are off the typical beaten tourist path, so it's unlikely that you will see another tourist during your time in village. This is what makes the villages so special.

The essence of the form of tourism that we are helping the villagers to participate in, is one that doesn't sacrifice their traditional way of life or culture for the sake of mass tourism. We have used our experience in village to create hands on activities and support materials to allow you to really connect with the villagers that you meet. You will feel like a member of the family, not an anonymous 'tourist.' You will be accompanied by a translator so that you can ask questions to local guides (who can't speak English but who we want to continue to support and encourage) and villagers throughout your trip.

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## 2. Preparing for your Trip

This chapter will highlight all the necessary things to get done before you leave. Remember that you might need at least two to three months to attend to some of these items prior to leaving. Make sure to leave enough time.

Use the checklist below to make sure you take all the appropriate action before you leave.

### Checklist

#### 2-3 months before

- Book flights
- Immunizations and Insurance
- Thai visa (if staying longer than 30 days)

#### 1 month before

- Money - exchange money and Travelers Cheques
- If planning to use debit or credit card abroad, inform your bank
- Check if your mobile works in Thailand
- Make a copy of all important addresses and phone numbers to take with you ie. friends and family, embassy, insurance details etc.
- Make a copy of all important numbers and addresses to leave with family back home
- Reconfirm flights (if required)

### International Flights into Thailand

There are two international airports in Thailand: Bangkok and Phuket. Most people fly to Bangkok and then take either a domestic flight to Phuket or a night bus which stops directly in Kuraburi (see the next section: Arriving in Thailand for more details). Whatever you decide, be sure to book your international flight well in advance to avoid lack of availability and price increase. Being flexible with your dates can help reduce the price and may give you time to travel before or after your time with us. If you are not sure if you want to travel afterwards or prolong your stay, it's best to book a flight with a changeable return date.

## Immunizations and insurance

There are a number of immunizations recommended for Thailand including Polio, Hepatitis A, Typhoid Fever and Tetanus. Also recommended are Hepatitis B, Rabies, Japanese Encephalitis, Tuberculosis and Diphtheria. The US Center for Disease and Control website ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) provides detailed health and immunization information for travelers.

Please see your doctor or travel clinic at least three months in advance of leaving as some courses of injections take this amount of time to complete.

Although malaria tablets are not essential in the area in which we work, you may need to get some if you plan traveling near the borders of neighboring countries or into them. Bring plenty of insect repellent and any anti-mosquito devices you feel the need for as mosquitoes can also carry other diseases, such as dengue fever. A mosquito net is the standard in our homestay villages.

You should consider purchase a travel insurance policy, which includes medical emergency. Make sure that all activities you plan to do both with us and in your own time are covered. Some activities, such as diving, are not covered by some insurers.

## Visas

### If you are staying less than 30 days

For citizens of many countries, you will not need a visa to Thailand in advance. You can have your passport stamped when you arrive. It is free and you don't need to bring extra passport photos. However, this is only valid for 30 days and you must show your return ticket upon arrival to show that you plan to leave. On the arrival card, write 'holiday' for travel purpose and put 'Kuraburi, Phang Nga Province' for address.

Important: Please double check with Thailand Immigration Bureau website (<http://www.immigration.go.th/>) to ensure that you do not require any visa to enter the country.

### If you are staying over 30 days

If you plan to stay for 60 *consecutive* days or less, you will need to apply for a 60-day Tourist Visa before coming to Thailand. And if you plan to stay for under 90 *consecutive* days, a 90-day non-immigrant 'O' single entry visa is required.

Please note that these single entry visas will expire automatically if you exit Thailand at any time during the intended stay period. So plan your travel itinerary first to determine if you need a visa or not.

Visa can be obtained by visiting the Thai Embassy or consulate in your country. Please contact the embassy of your choice to find out the required documents to get your visa. Details can be found on the Thailand Immigration Bureau website.

## Money

Debit cards and travelers cheques can be used across the country and in Kuraburi. Please contact your bank before you leaving for your trip to let them know you will be using your card abroad and make sure you find out if there will be additional charges for oversea usage. There are banks that do not charge for transactions abroad or have low transaction fees. Do your research ahead of time.

We recommend bringing your home country currency and exchange it at the airport when you arrive at Thailand. You can always get better exchange rate for Baht in Thailand than anywhere else.

The approximate exchange rate is\*:

1 US dollar:	34 Baht	1 Australian dollar:	27 Baht
1 Euro:	47 Baht	1 Sterling pound:	55 Baht

*\*Prices calculated on July 8, 2009 using xe.com*

## Mobile Phones

Mobiles on the GSM network from your home country will work here although getting your phone unlocked and buying a local SIM card here is often a lot cheaper. SIM cards can be bought for about 100 Baht at convenient stores or mobile shops. Refill cards are available from 60 Baht.

If you are going to Ban Talae Nok village, our advice is to buy a DTAC (Happy) SIM card, it has the best reception in the village compare to other networks.

## Important documents

For safety and back up we advise you to make photocopies of all important documents including passport, flight tickets, travel insurance policy, and driving license. Leave one at home and take one with you, packed in a separate place from the original documents. Emailing yourself important document numbers (passport number, ticket numbers, Traveler's Cheque numbers etc.) will also ensure you have a permanent copy that you can access wherever you are.

It's also worth leaving a friend or family member all your card numbers and the phone numbers of the card hotlines so that they can cancel your cards for you if you lose them.

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## 3. Packing List

If you have a domestic flight in Thailand, be sure to check the luggage limit with the airline! It is also a good idea to carry your items in a big backpack and a day pack. Many of the items below, especially clothing, are also available in Thailand.

### Clothing:

- T-shirts
- Long shorts or trousers
- Old clothes that can get dirty or sweaty
- Sandals, flip flops
- Sensible shoes or trainers for hiking
- T-shirt and shorts for swimming
- Sarong
- Sunhat
- Rain coat for green season (between June and October)

### Documents:

- Passport
- Tickets
- Travel Insurance details
- Medical details
- Money – cash, Debit Card, Credit Card, Travelers Cheques
- Photocopy of passport, tickets, and insurance documents
- Driver's License

### Other items:

- Sunscreen (at least SPF 30)
- Insect repellent with Deet
- First aid kit with plasters, Imodium, pain killers
- Toiletries [after sun, wipes, tampons (not available everywhere in Thailand)]
- Personal medication(s)
- Sunglasses
- Combination padlocks for bags etc

- Plug adapter (two flat pins)
- Extra toilet paper
- Ear plugs
- Reusable water bottle (safe drinking water is provided in the villages)
- At least one torch (flashlight) and extra batteries
- Photos of your family, hobbies, and friends, as villagers are always interested in learning about other cultures and lifestyles (avoid pictures that flaunt "wealth" -- your home or car, for example).
- Extra memory card and batteries for your camera
- A souvenir from your country as a present for hosts (not expensive or luxurious; something like a postcard or calendar is a good idea)

***Don't forget to leave a photocopy of your documents with someone back home!***

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## 4. Arriving in Thailand

At immigration your passport will be stamped with a 30-day stay or longer from your date of arrival, depending on your visa. Check the stamp to make sure the date is correct.

### Arriving at Bangkok

You can take a local bus, an airport bus or a taxi into downtown Bangkok. There are many hotels and guesthouses in the city, the most popular being on Khao San Road (within walking distance to the Grand Palace) or on Sukumvit Road (on the Skytrain BTS line). Booking can be done for many of these over the Internet in advance.

### Transportation from Bangkok

For domestic flight from Bangkok to Phuket, there are a number of cheap airlines which can be booked on the internet, including Air Asia, Tiger Airways, Bangkok Airways, Jetstar Asia, Thai Airways. Make sure when you're booking that you leave at least two hours between your international flight into Bangkok and check in for the domestic flight to Phuket.

Alternatively, you can take a metered taxi to Bangkok's Southern Bus Terminal (*Sai Tai Mai* in Thai). Buses generally leave between 17:00 and 21:00 and take about 10 hours to get to Kuraburi. They arrive very early in the morning just near to our office. Make sure the bus travels down the Andaman coast through Kuraburi.

There are different classes of bus available, ranging from second class to VIP which has more space comfort. A ticket costs from around 600 Baht or higher, depending on the class. Make sure the destination is Kuraburi, NOT Krabi!! You can't book ahead online or over the phone, you have to buy your ticket in person at the Southern Bus Terminal. Plan to leave for the terminal before 4:30pm, as the traffic usually gets much worse after this time. If you are traveling during Thai public holidays, it is advised that you arrive at the bus terminal as early as possible.

Our recommendation is to take the government bus (which is labeled 999 at the ticket counter). They have a daily departure at 20:00, arriving in Kuraburi at around 06:00. Be prepared – these buses can be quite chilly (blankets are provided; but take a jacket with you), and often include very loud "entertainment" for the first several hours. This could be a great time to have those earplugs and a travel pillow!

Once on the bus, inform the driver or the conductor that you want to get off at Kuraburi. If you get into a jam, the Thai spelling of "Kuraburi" is:

**คุระบุรี**

In the event that a direct bus to Kuraburi is not available, you can take a bus to Ranong, and then take another bus down to Kuraburi.

### Transportation from Phuket

From Phuket airport, buses and taxis are available to connect to Phuket town or to the bus terminal. It is about three hours from Phuket airport to Kuraburi. Buses from Phuket town to Kuraburi cost about 1 Baht.

### Settling in

Jet lag is common when people first arrive. However you choose to deal with it, make sure you drink plenty of water to combat dehydration.

You will be able to contact home and inform them of your safe arrival when you get here so friends and families don't need to worry!

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## 5. Thai Life

### Thailand Essentials

Time	GMT + 7 hours.
Money	Thai Baht.
Phone code	+ 66
Electricity	220V (usually two flat pins). You will need a plug adaptor (available in Kuraburi).
Religion	Predominantly Buddhist (Theravada tradition). However, the villages we work with are a mix of Buddhist, Muslim and animist.
Weather	Thailand has three main seasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dry and hot – March to May</li><li>• Rainy – June to October (The rain helps to cool off the heat!)</li><li>• Dry – November to February</li></ul>

### Thai Culture

Thailand is a wonderful place full of wonderful people. For this reason we would like to enlighten you about a few cultural points that will make your stay here more enjoyable and comfortable for both travelers and locals:

- Instead of shaking hands or kissing in Thailand to say hello, place your hands in the prayer like position and pull them towards your chest, bowing your head slightly. This is called a 'wai'.
- Do not touch Thai people on the head as it is a sign of disrespect.
- Do not sit with your feet stretched out pointing at someone, or any Buddha images as it is also very rude and disrespectful.
- Remove shoes when entering temples or Thai houses
- Please respect the Royal Family and do not make negative comments about them.
- Smiling and attempting to speak Thai will really impress people. They call us 'farang' which just means foreigner and is not disrespectful in any way.

### Monks

Buddhist monks are a common sight all over Thailand and are easily recognized with their orange robes and shaved heads. It is strictly forbidden for male monks to have direct physical contact with women, this includes handing them something. It is acceptable for women to offer a gift by placing it on the ground in front of a monk and backing away, or by giving it to a man to offer for the woman.

Men can come in direct contact with monks. Please treat monks with the utmost respect, to speak to them respectfully and 'wai' when greeting, saying goodbye and thank you.

#### Why wai?

The 'wai', putting the hands in a prayer-like position, is used to greet, pay respect, thank, and say farewell. When and how people 'wai' someone depends on two things; status and age. Thai people do not 'wai' people of the same age, they 'wai' older people and those of a higher status (like monks). If a child 'wai's', there is no need to 'wai' back, just smile and say hello.

#### Pe or Nong?

*Pe* loosely translates into older brother or sister and *Nong* younger brother or sister. You will hear people referring to each other as either *Pe* \_\_(name)\_\_ or *Nong* \_\_(name)\_\_. There is not really an English equivalent. If someone is older than you, you can call them *Pe* and if they are younger than you, *Nong*. It's a great way to avoid embarrassment if you forget someone's name as you can just call them *Pe* or *Nong*. For Muslim people it's *Bang* \_\_(name) and *Nong Baow* \_\_(name).

#### Mai pen rai

You will hear 'Mai pen rai' a lot during your trip. It translates into 'not at all, you're welcome, no problem, it doesn't matter, no worries, never mind.' 'Mai pen rai' is typically Thai and shows consideration for others, conflict and anger avoidance and a desire for peace.

#### Greng jie – to have consideration for other's feelings

Understanding the meaning of *greng jie* reveals a lot about Thai's and their way of thinking. It loosely translates into 'to have consideration for others'. In reality, it means thinking about how what be said or done will affect others around. It allows Thais to avoid conflict, awkward challenges, conflicts and basically any difficult or unpleasant situation. In many cases, a Thai will decide not to act or speak a lot more than westerners would. Keeping their opinions to themselves avoids conflict and being disrespectful to their peers.

#### Jie yen – chill out

This translates into 'cool heart' and means to keep cool and to calm down if feeling getting a bit hot under the collar for whatever reason. Being *jie lom* or hot-hearted displays a lack of self control, rudeness and poor attitude which can make others 'lose face'. This all relates to the Thai's avoidance of confrontation. In Thailand it is considered disrespectful to put someone in a position where they 'lose face'. Whatever happens, you should keep cool and do not raise your voice or lose your temper.

A simple solution to avoid making another person 'lose face' is to turn a criticism into a polite request. For example:

*Criticism:* There's something wrong with the door to my room, it won't shut.

*Request:* I was wondering if you could help me. I couldn't shut the door to my room and I wasn't sure if I was opening it correctly.

This has allowed the person they are dealing with to 'save face' as it was not a direct criticism of their door, more like their own inability to make it work! This is more polite than complaining and will increase your chances of receiving the help you need.

### **Health and safety**

Thailand is a relatively safe place if you use your common sense.

- Cover up in the sun, wear a hat
- Use high factor sun cream
- Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration
- Make sure you are up to date with your vaccinations
- Use mosquito repellent and wear loose cotton long sleeved clothes
- Use common sense to avoid difficult situations (eg. avoid wearing expensive jewelry)

## For more advice

Please check the latest travel information and advise from the foreign affairs office of your country.

## Useful numbers

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Our office	+66 (0) 87 917 7165
	+66 (0) 86 907 1559
Thai Tourist Police (English speaking)	1699 (dialing in Thailand)
Thai Police	191 (dialing in Thailand)
Kuraburi Police Station	+66 (0) 87 649 1275-7
Kuraburi Hospital	+66 (0) 87 649 1353

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## 6. Regional Information

### The North Andaman Region

The North Andaman coast of Thailand is an extraordinary region of ecological and cultural interest. Compared to other areas of natural beauty in the region, it is remarkably undeveloped and many communities still survive by their traditional livelihoods.

Much of the mountainous and coastal zones have been designated as protected areas, in recognition of their unique importance to Thailand's natural heritage. Two of the oldest and richest ecosystems on our planet, the coral reefs and the Southeast Asian rainforest, which date back 160 million years, still survive here almost side by side. The combination of mangrove swamps, coral reefs, limestone karsts, beaches and evergreen tropical forest provide habitats for an amazing array of wildlife. This rich blend creates a fascinating environment for exploration which is as contrasting as it is captivating.

### Information on Kuraburi

Our office is in Kuraburi, a small town in Phang Nga province on the West coast of Thailand. You will have most of what you need in the town - a post office, hairdressers, laundrettes, banks, Internet cafés and local markets.

#### Transport

Kuraburi has no bus station, only a bus ticket booth located in the middle of the town. The bus stops at the side of the road near the ticket booth. Direct bus services are available to Phuket, Phang Nga, Chumphon, Ranong, Krabi and Bangkok.

Kuraburi is a small enough place to walk around, but motorbike taxis are situated outside of the market and can be hired for distances that are just too far to walk. We can also organize transportation for longer distances and activities.

#### Internet

There is an Internet Café called "Friends De Sea" near the bus station. It is run by P' Be and P'Daa, both of whom speak very good English and make a great cup of coffee.

#### Dining

For breakfast, head to the local market in the morning for *jok* (rice porridge), waffle, sticky rice, noodles, coffee and tea. The market usually closes by 10am. For lunch and dinner, there are many local restaurants to choose from. A plate of rice or noodles soup is the most common order for lunch. There is a late-afternoon market from around 4pm to 8pm in front of the school on the main road near our office. All sorts of snacks and fruits are available. For more than one person, it is common to order a few plates of dishes and serve with rice.

### Money

There is a bank with money exchange and ATM in town on the opposite side of the road from our office that is open from 9am until 4pm. It is called Krung Thai Bank.

### Shopping

There is a daily morning market next to the 7-11 selling fruit, vegetables and clothes. On Tuesday and Saturday mornings there is a larger market at the same place. There are many small shops selling snacks and drinks along the main road. Over the counter medicines are available at the pharmacies in town.

### Massage

There is one Thai Massage shop in town. It is located on our street, about an eight-minute walk from our office. No English is spoken there.

### Laundry

Boon Piya Resort has a laundry service. The owner, Ger Huey, normally has it done in one day. It usually costs about 50 Baht for one plastic bag.

### Emergency Services

There is a police station and a hospital in town.

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## 7. Visitors' Code of Conduct

Please respect the following visitor's code of conduct during your stay in the village:

- There is no alcohol or pork allowed in Muslim villages, please respect this important village protocol
- Please take off your shoes before entering a house, temple or building.
- Women should dress modestly so as to cover knees, chest and shoulders. Please avoid low cut tops and low hung jeans. We recommend T-shirts and board shorts over your bikini when at a beach near the villages.
- Please do not show strong affection in public
- Please ask before taking photos of people
- We advise not to feed the monkeys or wild animals
- Please leave coral and shells on the beach

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## 8. In-village guidelines

Staying in village will allow you to experience how other people live, work, relax and even perceive the world. Awareness of cultural differences allows you to understand and appreciate the villagers' way of life. We have worked closely with the villagers to create some in village guidelines to help you know what to expect during your time in village. By respecting the local culture, you will have a more enriching cultural experience. Details may vary from village to village, but this can be used as a guideline.

### **Eating**

Eating with the homestay family will certainly be one of the highlights of the trip; you can assure you will be fed until you're fit to burst! The Thai way of eating is quite different from Western methods. Thais use a fork and a spoon instead of a knife and fork. The fork is used to push food onto the spoon and then the spoon is the one that goes in the mouth. You should not worry if this feels a bit strange, you can just carry on using a fork. Chopsticks are generally used only for noodle soup (*gwit teaow naam*). The Thai style of eating is to place all dishes in the centre. Each person will have their own plate with a portion of rice on it. From one of the main dishes in the middle take a small portion (using a serving spoon if provided) and place it on your rice. You should not load a complete meal on to your plate right away but just serve yourself a little bit at a time. If in doubt, you can watch how others do it.

Do let us know of any dietary requirements, but also make sure you are willing to try new things.

### **Comfort**

If you have chosen to stay in a homestay, you'll be warmly welcomed and well taken care of. Villagers will make the utmost effort to ensure your comfort. However they do live in a more traditional way and are not used to the levels of comfort to which many people are accustomed. In the homestay you can expect a mattress, a mosquito net, blanket and pillow as sleeping arrangement.

### **In the bathroom**

Many homes have Asian style squat toilets. Those who practice yoga will find it easier. Squat down, facing the door and do your business. If you use toilet paper, please put it in the bin provided, as the plumbing is not equipped. Pour water into the toilet to flush from the bucket next to the toilet.

### **Showering**

The traditional way to shower is to use a small bowl which is dipped into a large container of water to rinse with. Very refreshing and great fun once you get used to it. There is no hot water in village.

### **Basic level of fitness**

Most activities are for all people of all capabilities and fitness levels. Although you do not need to be very fit, some activities may involve climbing into a long-tail boat (sometimes with a ladder), crossing rickety bridges and swimming. Please, inform us of any special needs or medical conditions before the tour so that we can assess its suitability for you.

### **Gifts**

You may want to bring a small thank you present for your host family or new Thai friends that you make. It can be something as simple as a calendar, postcard or trinket from your home town. Bring some photographs of your family, your favorite food, a typical meal or some holiday snaps, these acts as a good point of conservation and cultural exchange. Thai people are obsessed with food and eating!

Please do not give toys and sweets indiscriminately to the children in the village – this can lead to expectation that every time they see a Westerner, they will get something. (If you have been to the hill tribe villages in the north, you'll understand what we are trying to avoid.)

Instead of tipping individuals, please make a donation to the community fund, detailing how you would like the money to be spent.

### **Responsibility and Behavior**

All we ask of visitors and volunteers is to be patient, open-minded, and willing to accept new things.

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## **9. Support materials**

We encourage our visitors to learn some Thai words as well as teach some English during their trip. To assist with this, Andaman Discoveries has two Thai-English phrasebooks, one for you and one written for the villagers that you can use.

[http://www.andamandiscoveries.com/pdf/phrasebook\\_basic.pdf](http://www.andamandiscoveries.com/pdf/phrasebook_basic.pdf)

Previous volunteers have developed a useful homestay pack with flashcards that you can print out and laminate before you leave. It will help you communicate with the villagers and contains ideas for games and activities.

<http://www.andamandiscoveries.com/curriculum/homestay/index.html>

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## 10. Responsible Travel

Thailand is a captivating country with incredible places to visit. There are also many interesting neighboring countries. If you need advice on activities or other places to go on your travels, please feel free to ask a staff member.

The Andaman Discoveries' team believes in the principles of responsible travel. Please be aware of your surroundings. As parts of our projects involve conservation, we take great pride in the environment and do what we can to preserve and protect it.

Even if you see Thais dropping litter, please make an example and put litter in bins. Say no to plastic bags in shops when possible or re-use the ones you have. Please don't use excess water in the bathroom as it is a limited source here. Try not to buy plastic bottles (instead refill those you have). Leave shells and coral in their natural place.

For tips and ideas to travel responsibly, visit <http://www.thegoodtourist.com> and <http://www.responsibletravel.com>

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## 11. Recommended Reading

For a complete background on Andaman Discoveries, be sure and check out these pages on our website before your visit:

**History:** <http://www.andamandiscoveries.com/about.history.html>

**Videos:** <http://www.andamandiscoveries.com/about.video.html>

**Newsletters Archive** (beginning after the tsunami):  
<http://www.andamandiscoveries.com/news.newsletter.html>

**Press:** <http://www.andamandiscoveries.com/news.press.html>

**Blog** (which includes newsletter articles and past guest experiences):  
<http://www.andamandiscoveries.com/blog/about.blog.html>

### Other Web links:

General information about Thailand: <http://www.tourismthailand.org> and <http://www.thaismile.co.uk>

For a discussion into Responsible Tourism and the issues involved with Community-based Tourism, go to: <http://www.theblueyonder.com/newsletter/december2007interview.htm>

### Guidebooks:

Frommer's – Thailand with Your Family, 2009, page 127  
Lonely Planet – Thailand Islands & Beaches, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2008, page 278  
Lonely Planet – Phuket Encounter, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, 2008, page 135  
La Thaïlande au naturel – 2007, page 379 – 381  
Le Petit Futé Thaïlande, 2008, page 570  
National Geographic Traveler – Thailand, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 2009, page 340  
Rough Guide – Thailand, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition / 2006, page 710-712  
The Green Travel Guide: Your Passport to Responsible, Guilt-Free Travel, 2008  
Strandhytter i Thailand, 2008, page 97

## **12. Chok Dee! (Good luck)**

We hope this information booklet has been useful. We are sure you will have an amazing experience here with us. If you read this booklet, there shouldn't be any unwelcome surprises and it will help ensure that your trip runs smoothly and calmly. You'll get out what you put in. If you are open-minded, patient with a have a go attitude, you'll be fine.

Don't forget we are always here to answer questions, give guidance and for general support so if you wish to contact us before, during or after your stay, please do.

Thank you for choosing Andaman Discoveries.