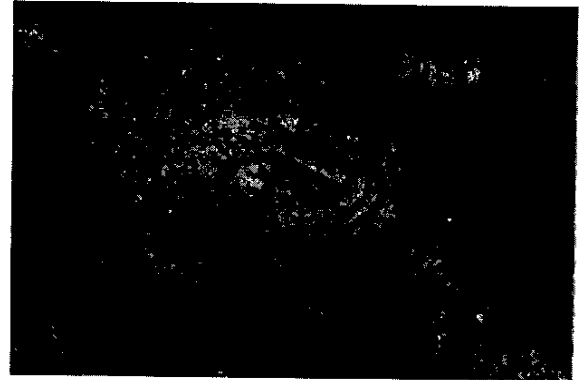

CULTURE SHOCK
IN BANGKOK
Little anecdotes from Bangkok and Thailand

HÅKAN ALM



HISTORY

Jan -93 Arrived in Thailand to Study at AIT (Asian Institute of Technology) in Bangkok As the final part of his Bachelor Degree from Hogskolan of Boras. Most of Hakan's Classmates went to the United States for International studies but Hakan had always wanted to go to Asia. By coincidence Professor Bill Rice (earlier teaching Hakan a course in Human



Communications at Hogskolan) Was lecturing in Bangkok and spoke about the possibilities of studying at AIT.

May- 93 Finished Courses in Datacom and Telecom passed with fair (but far from great) grades.

March -93 Started work for "Guide of Bangkok" an entertainment magazine. Worked with Sales and Layout. Salary US\$ 250 / month!! (just survived). Since then Hakan has only been back in Sweden to sell off his assets and for short visits to see family and friends.

July -94 Started Work at Canadian Embassy in Bangkok As Systems Administrator

June -96 Founded Zeta Systems, Computer Networking Company, focusing on Western owned and/or managed companies and organizations.

August -96 Resigned from the Embassy to work full-time at Zeta Systems.

August -96 Zeta won its first large contract with Philip Morris (Marlboro Cigarettes) Zeta is currently working on projects with Philip Morris, Ericsson, SAS, Swedish, Canadian, British, New Zealand, Norwegian Embassies and Canadian, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish Chamber of Commerce and many, many more.

October -98 Nominated Entrepreneur of the year by the Thai Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

September -99 Co-founded Atlantis Adventures. A scuba diving company in Phuket, Thailand which offers everything from dive courses to day trips and live-aboard diving on a 5 star ship that takes up to 20 persons.

November -99 Co-founded Ultima Vision House. An IT Solution provider specializing on Turn Key solutions for Large corporate companies and organizations. Currently involved in a project with Volvo Thailand.

Year 2000 and Beyond Planning to spend more time in Phuket to build up the Scuba diving business and to reside there. When the business is fully operational (Dive Center, Retail Shop, Pub/Restaurant) the aim is to set up a branch of Zeta Systems in Phuket, which has a good Market potential

The two most lucrative businesses in Thailand today are IT and Tourism, we therefore are very pleased to be involved in both.

A simple example: Thailand has aprox. 60 million people (about seven times as much as Sweden) and maybe as many computers as in Sweden. In ten years it is realistic that Thailand will be as "computer dense" as Sweden is today. This will mean if Zeta Systems can keep its market share we can **multiply our sales by seven (7) in 10 years!!!** Let us now also assume that we are a little bit better than the competition and can double our market share. That then means **multiply our sales by fourteen (14) in 10 years.** This is a very exciting prospect and will keep me in Thailand for the foreseeable future.

ANECDOTES

Language Tonal problems I

A friend tries to order a Coke in a restaurant:

- Can I have a Coke please.
- Sorry no Have.
- (Trying again) Can I have a Cooke please.
- Sorry No have
- Gooke , Gok, Kook,
- No have
- Ok Never mind, Just give me a Pepsi
- No have Pepsi Have only coke!



Language Tonal problems II

For a foreigner speaking Thai it leaves a lot of room for misunderstandings. For example the word "MA" can mean come, horse or dog depending on how the tone is pronounced. One fine day I had to cancel a meeting. I called the secretary of my client who doesn't speak any English at all. I tell her:

- Wan nee Khun Hakan mai ma (I was trying to explain that I am not coming today), but the girl understood it as "I am not a horse today" which obviously did not make any sense to her and the message never got passed on.



THE THAI LEGAL SYSTEM (THE FOREIGNER IS ALWAYS WRONG)

Tommy's car crash:

A friend of mine who lives in Phuket was hit by a bus from behind, at the time his car was parked. The Police fined him US\$ 500, the logic being if he was not in Thailand the accident would not have happened.

GESTURES AND BODY LANGUAGE

In Thailand the way to beckon someone is very similar to the way we would wave goodbye. Buying pancakes from a street vendor I paid for my food and started to walk away, looking back the salesman was waving goodbye to me. I thought what a nice man and waved back to him and went on my way, the vendor was furious and came running after me, explaining that I was 5 cents short on my bill.

THAILAND – GENERAL INFO

Positioned at the meeting point of two great cultural systems of Asia – China and India, Thailand is a country like no other. In every day life, Chinese culture has mixed very well with Thai culture. Which is based on Buddhism and Brahmanism, India has also a very strong influence today in Thai Culture and religion.

Still despite these two very important influences Thailand has a very special and individual character of it's own. A big part of Thailand's unique individuality is due to the fact it has never been colonized by Europe and in fact the name Thailand means the land of freedom.

Country

Thailand covers an area of 517,000 sq. km (slightly larger than Sweden) and is bordered by Myanmar (Burma), Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia. From the north of the country down to the south, Thailand can boast just about every type of landscape and environment. It's said that the only thing you can not get here is snow.

In the north of Thailand the mountain scenery and lush green hills offer a fascinating insight into the lives and history of the many different Hill Tribe villages. At the opposite end of the country and in total contrast to the north ,Thailand offers some of the best beach resorts in Asia.

People

The Thai people are certainly one of the biggest assets of Thailand . It doesn't matter if you can speak their language or if they can speak yours, Thai people will always be gracious and are the perfect hosts for any occasion.

Religion

95 % of population in Thailand are Buddhist and believe in reincarnation. Throughout the country you will see many glorious temples all so known as Wat and monument of the Lord Buddha. Buddhism is more a way of life than a religion and it plays a key part on the general nature of the people , they are far more relaxed and carefree. Other religions do exist in Thailand and the King protects everyones right to religious choice.

Climate

Thailand is a tropical country and as such always hot and sticky. There are three main seasons in Thailand .

November - March is the cool season with average temperature daytime of 28 – 30 and night temperature of 23-26 degree Celsius.

April-May is the hot season with average temperature daytime of 36 degree Celsius and night time 28 degrees.

June – October is the rainy season with an annual rain fall of about 1500 –mm rain in the middle of the country. The showers are often quick and very heavy and after an hour or two the sunshine usually comes back out.

Etiquette

Religion and the Thai Monarchy are the two most sacred things in Thailand. Almost all types of behavior are tolerated as long as it doesn't insult one of these.

If you are intending to visit the many temples in Thailand please adhere to local advice about the dress code. Shorts and short sleeve tops are not acceptable attire and remember to remove your shoes (also applicable to the Grand Palace)

When greeting someone in Thailand you would not shake hands but instead 'Wai' .This is done by placing the palm of your hands together (prayer style) and bow gently. If somebody wai's you remember to return the gesture.

People are usually addressed by their first name and by using the prefix Khun .For example Billy Smith would be Khun Billy.

Do's and Don'ts in Thailand

The Smile

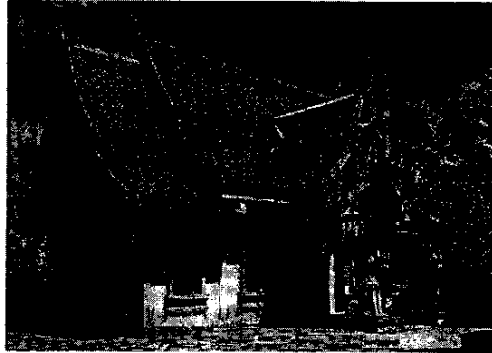
Thailand is known as the Land of Smiles, Thais smile much of the time. The smile is the correct mechanism for repairing minor breaches of etiquette. It can be used as an excuse, to thank somebody, to show embarrassment and avoid conflicts. The Thais smile their way out of almost any situation, carefully avoiding any words or actions that might be regretted later. A smile has solved many problems - smile back!

Anger-Conflicts

Any individual who openly demonstrates his anger or threatens the community. In this situation Thais are normally very tolerant and try to avoid conflicts at all cost.

Heads & Feet

The top of the head is the most important part of and the feet are the least important and dirtiest part of the body. Heads being almost sacred and feet being something a Thai would rather not talk about – One should be cautious of what one do with extremities. Never point your feet to anyone or anything not even to a suitcase! The worst insult you can pay a Thai is to point at his sacred head with your lowly foot.



Equality/Seniority/Status

Status and seniority are much parts of Thai life. Although you are only one month older than a friend you will always be considered as “Phii” (The Elder) The Elder is superior and to be respected

Religion-Spirits

95% of the population (approx. 60 million) in Thailand are Buddhist and believe in reincarnation. Monks dressed in yellow saffron robes have high status and should be treated with respect. Touching a monk or his robe is absolutely taboo for a woman, this would result in the monk partaking elaborate purification rituals. Beside the Buddhism the Thais have a strong belief in spirits. Some spirits can be trusted and respected, others cannot be trusted and must be feared. In Phuket (South Thailand) about 30% of the population are Muslims.

Thai- English / The Voice

Be careful to make sure you are understood. If you think somebody does not fully understand you (and the chances are he doesn't) then repeat yourself and try to use a simple language but - Never raise your voice and show irritation - A raised voice is impolite and as you loose your self control you also loose respect.

Eating Habits

Eating habits are informal. Thais eat with a fork and a spoon, the spoon is held in the right hand (unless you are left-handed). The fork is used to push the food onto the spoon

The King - Royalty

Next to Buddha and Monks the King, although no longer officially sacred, is treated with such respect and reverence that the visitor might categorise him and his image as being sacred.

At 08.00 every morning and 18.00 every evening, the Thai National Anthem is played in all public areas and media's, out of respect for the King. The King, Bhumipol Auduladey or King Rama IX, is

The worlds longest reigning King. He ascended the throne in 1946 and married Queen Sirikit in 1950.