



March 2011

In this Issue:

- Message from the Consul General
- Consular Section Closure at Songkran
- Air Quality Alert
- Songkran Safety
- What's Going on with Your Website?
- Tax Time is Coming...
- Routine Consular Services in Chiang Mai

Consulate General of the
United States of America

387 Wichanond Road
Muang, Chiang Mai 50300

Tel.: 053-107-700
Fax: 053-252-663
Email: acschn@state.gov
Web:
chiangmai.usconsulate.gov

Consulate Quarterly

*News and information for the American community in northern Thailand
from the U.S. Consulate General in Chiang Mai*

Message from Consul General Susan N. Stevenson

Years ago in Bangkok, a Thai friend told me the country had three seasons, "hot," "very hot," and "bloody hot." After a very pleasant cool season, we're in for the latter. The burning season has arrived as well, and you will find useful information on the next page for monitoring air quality and your respiratory health.

The Thai New Year holiday will help us cool off, but it will also bring some safety challenges. My last Songkran in Chiang Mai was back in 1994, but I remember it well, with hordes of revelers flinging water at passersby – especially me in an open tuk-tuk. Most of the water came from the moat, and the really evil revelers put ice in it first. Back then, however, I don't remember alcohol playing the role it does now. Songkran is therefore a time to stay safe, as detailed on page 3.

Finally, as you may know, we have a new U.S. Ambassador, the very energetic Kristie Kenney (<http://ambkristie.us/>). She has already visited Chiang Mai twice, including for our February 10 reception to welcome her and mark the 60th anniversary of the Consulate's founding. We expect her back often.

This newsletter helps you stay connected to the Consulate. You can stay even more connected by visiting us on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/chiangmai.usconsulate>). I also have a weekly blog (http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/consul_general/consul-generals-corner.html) about which I've been known to tweet ([@stevensonns](https://twitter.com/stevensonns)).

Consular Section Closed for Routine Services During Songkran Week, April 11-15

The Consular section will be closed for **routine** services during the Songkran holiday, April 11-15. However, we are always available to assist Americans who experience emergencies, such as deaths, arrests, or serious illnesses. In such situations, please contact our American Citizen Services unit at 053-107-777.

This closure affects non-emergency services, such as passport issuance (including extra pages and picking up new passports), notary services (including those required for Thai immigration purposes), reports of birth, and federal benefits assistance (including picking up checks). If you will require any of these, please take care of them before Songkran week.

For routine services, please make an appointment at our website, <http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/service/appointments/>. Also, for any last-minute needs, **we will have special, walk-in service hours on Friday, April 8 from 0800 to 1100.** We will offer all routine services except Consular Reports of Birth Abroad (CRBAs). We are not accepting appointments for that day; service will be on a first-come, first-served basis.

The Consulate wishes you and your families a happy and safe Songkran.

AIR QUALITY ALERT

Every year, Chiang Mai and other areas of northern Thailand experience periods of unhealthy air during the dry season. Smoke in the air can hurt your eyes, irritate your respiratory system, and worsen chronic heart and lung disease. People who have heart or lung disease, older adults, and children are the most sensitive to smoke and most likely to experience health problems as a result.

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK OUT FOR?

You should be aware of the local Air Quality Index (AQI) and take appropriate measures to minimize the impact on you and your family's health. The Thai government's Pollution Control Department calculates the AQI daily and posts measurements at the following website: <http://www.pcd.go.th/AirQuality/Regional/Default.cfm>

This is how U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) explains AQI (<http://airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=aqibasics.aqi>):

- **0-50 = "Good."** Air quality is considered satisfactory, and air pollution poses little or no risk.
- **51-100 = "Moderate."** Air quality is acceptable; however, for some pollutants there may be a moderate health concern for a very small number of people. For example, people who are unusually sensitive to ozone may experience respiratory symptoms.
- **101-150 = "Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups."** Although general public is not likely to be affected at this range, people with lung disease, older adults and children are at a greater risk from exposure to ozone, whereas persons with heart and lung disease, older adults and children are at greater risk from the presence of particles in the air.
- **151-200 = "Unhealthy."** Everyone may begin to experience some adverse health effects, and members of the sensitive groups may experience more serious effects.
- **201-300 = "Very Unhealthy."** This would trigger a health alert; everyone may experience more serious health effects.
- **Greater than 300 = "Hazardous."** This would trigger health warnings of emergency conditions. The entire population is likely to be affected.



HOW DO I PROTECT MYSELF AND MY FAMILY?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the following (<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/facts.asp>):

- **Pay attention to local air quality reports.** Listen and watch for news or health warnings about smoke. Also pay attention to public health messages about taking additional safety measures.
- If you are advised to stay indoors, **keep indoor air as clean as possible.** Keep windows and doors closed unless it is extremely hot. Run an air conditioner if you have one, but keep the fresh-air intake closed and the filter clean to prevent outdoor smoke from getting inside. If you do not have an air conditioner and it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed, seek shelter elsewhere.
- **Do not add to indoor pollution.** When smoke levels are high, do not use anything that burns, such as candles, fireplaces, or gas stoves. Do not vacuum, because vacuuming stirs up particles already inside your home. Do not smoke, because smoking puts even more pollution into the air.
- **Follow your doctor's advice** about medicines and about your respiratory management plan if you have asthma or another lung disease. Call your doctor if your symptoms worsen.
- **Do not rely on dust masks for protection.** Paper "comfort" or "dust" masks commonly found at hardware stores are designed to trap large particles, such as sawdust. These masks will not protect your lungs from smoke.

Songkran Safety

Some tips for a safe – and *sanuk* – holiday.

Chiang Mai is a wonderful place to be for many reasons, particularly the number of wonderful festivals. And the best of them is coming soon... Songkran!

Songkran, the Thai New Year, is celebrated with feasting and drinking, temple and family visits, and lots of water. The whole country is on the move – everyone wants to return home, like Americans do at Thanksgiving. City people will be going to the country, country people will be coming to the city, and roads will be closed for parades, street celebrations, and water fights.

We hope that you will get out and enjoy Songkran -- but we want you to do it safely. We have two big concerns for Americans here during Songkran: road safety and crime.

ROAD SAFETY: THINK DEFENSE

Just like back home during the New Year holiday, people here like to drink at Songkran. Unfortunately, this leads to more drinking and driving than normal. In combination with the things we mentioned above, this makes the road more dangerous than at other times. **To protect yourself, drive – and walk – defensively.** Keep a sharp lookout for erratic drivers and avoid them. And, of course, don't drink and drive. Even if you haven't had too much yourself, it might affect your ability to spot others who have.

If you are injured in an accident, call 191 (the local equivalent of 911) or the Tourist Police at 1155. Someone might tell you, "call the Consulate." That can wait until later – we're not doctors, and it's best to let the medical professionals take care of any injuries first.

PETTY CRIME: DON'T MAKE IT EASY

Festivals and crowds are excellent for pickpockets and purse-snatchers to do their work. **To protect yourself and your possessions, deprive criminals of targets.** Leave your passport, wallet, purse, and other valuables in the hotel safe or in a safe place at home. Carry a photocopy of your passport, which you can show police if they ask for ID. Bring only the cash you need for lunch, drinks, and taxi fare. If you're staying at a hotel, bring your room key and the hotel's business card with the address in Thai (the one they give to taxi drivers). But don't write down your room number for a thief to use.

If you become a victim of crime, your first concern should be your safety. Do not try to fight or chase a thief – give them what they want. Your stuff can be replaced; your life and health cannot. After the thief has gone, get to a place of safety. It could be a police station, a hotel, a hospital, or a restaurant – any place where there are other people, good lighting, and a telephone. If you need medical attention, go to a hospital or call 191 for an ambulance.

After you're in a safe place and have taken care of any injuries, then call Tourist Police at 1155. They will direct you where to report the crime. If you have difficulty communicating with the police, ask your hotel, guest

house, or tour company to help. Be sure to get both Thai and English copies of the police report – you might need them later, particularly if you lose credit cards or need to submit an insurance claim.



ANOTHER GOOD REASON TO LEAVE YOUR VALUABLES BEHIND

At most Songkran celebrations in the north, you're not likely come back dry. It's entirely possible that **you will be soaked to the skin, with your clothing (and everything in your pockets) waterlogged.** Carry that photocopy of your passport and the small amount of cash we mentioned earlier in a watertight plastic bag. Observe this rule: If water will damage it, leave it home. (If you must bring a mobile phone, put it in a plastic bag as well!)

SOME USEFUL THAI FOR EMERGENCIES

- Help me! = *chewy dewy*
- Please call an ambulance = *chewy ree-ak rote chook churn noi*
- Please call police = *chewy ree-ak tam-ruat noi*
- Please take me to the hospital = *chewy phaa chan pai rong paya baan*

WHAT'S GOING ON WITH YOUR WEBSITE?!?

We've been hearing that a lot lately. Last month, there were some problems with our website (as well as some changes for the better). We're sorry for any inconvenience these caused. We appreciate your letting us know when you encounter problems – that's how we know to fix them. Here's the back-story:

- **"Service Unavailable":** Many of you saw this message when you went to our appointment website to schedule a routine service.

What happened: According to the IT staff in Washington who maintain our appointment system, there was a intermittent communication problem between the database (where the appointments are stored) and the web server (which is how you and we interact with the database). It's fixed now.

- **New Look:** The Consulate's website has a new "look and feel," and the American Citizen Services pages were reorganized and updated.

What happened: Washington IT staff moved the Consulate's website to a new "platform." We took advantage of the transition to review and update Consular portions of the website. Our aim was to simplify navigation and increase the amount of information available to you. We hope that you like the changes.

- **Bad Links:** Some of you wrote recently to let us know about links on our website that went to old pages with out-of-date information, the wrong form, or were just plain dead.

What happened: Many of our pages didn't make a smooth transition to the new platform. Once we noticed this, we started debugging as quickly as we could. We fixed all the problems that we found, plus some others that we missed but you found! Thank you very much for letting us know about them.

Tax Time is Coming...

Since the beginning of the year, many of us have been receiving W-2s, 1099s, and other Internal Revenue Service (IRS) forms from employers, governments, banks, or financial institutions. Though taxpayers outside the United States get an extension of time to file their tax returns, it might take a while to get everything you need. We recommend that you get started early.

Read Me First: For U.S. taxpayers overseas, the first stop for official information about filing deadlines, mailing addresses, and exchange rates is the IRS web page for U.S. citizens and resident aliens abroad:

<http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=97324,00.html>

Tax Forms: We recommend that you get forms directly from the IRS website at:

www.irs.gov/formspubs/index.html. All IRS forms are available there, including computer-fillable versions of many. Due to space constraints, the Consulate does not stock IRS forms.

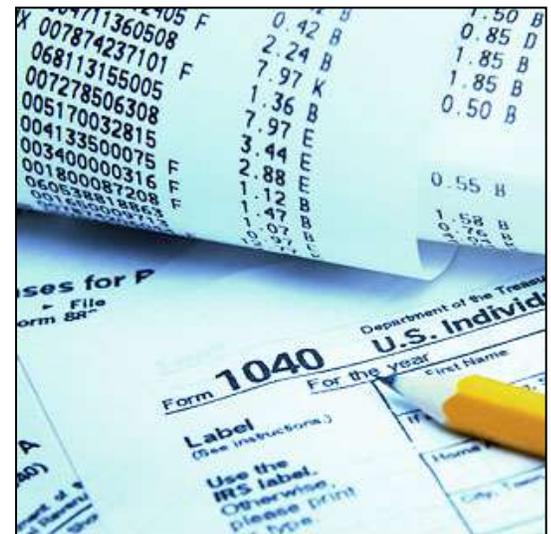
Your Address: When filling out your tax forms, please be sure to use your complete and correct mailing address. That is the address where the IRS will try to contact you if there are problems with your tax return. It also is the address where the IRS will send your tax refund check, if you receive one.

Please do not use the Consulate's address on your tax forms. We do not have the capacity to store or forward mail. If you do not have a reliable mailing address in Thailand, you may rent a box at a Thailand Post location. Or, you could ask family or friends in the United States to receive it for you. If we receive items from the IRS addressed to you at the Consulate, we must return them to the IRS.

Direct Deposit: If you expect to get a tax refund, you can specify that the IRS deposit the money directly into a U.S. bank account. To get your refund more quickly and to avoid the possibility that the check is delayed, misdirected, or lost in the mail, we recommend that you take advantage of this option.

Mailing Your Tax Return: If you are able to file electronically, we recommend that you do it. There is no risk of loss of delay in the mail, and the IRS will process your return (and send your refund) more quickly.

If you're sending the IRS a paper return, please mail your tax documents early enough to ensure that they reach the IRS before filing deadlines. We recommend that you use Fedex, UPS, DHL, or Thailand Post EMS services. These allow you to track your correspondence and have delivery confirmation -- peace of mind for something so important. The Consulate is not an IRS or U.S. postal facility, so we cannot accept tax returns for the IRS or mail them for you.



Tax Preparation Assistance: The IRS does not have personnel in Thailand who can provide tax assistance. Instead, The IRS Office in Philadelphia provides international tax assistance. They are open Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. EST and can be contacted by:

- Phone: 001-1-267-941-1000 (not toll-free)
- Fax: 001-1-267-941-1055
- Mail: Internal Revenue Service, Philadelphia, PA 19255-0725

At the Consulate, we are not tax experts, and federal regulations prevent us from providing advice on the preparation of tax returns. If you need tax advice or services, we recommend that you contact a law or accounting firm qualified in U.S. tax law. There is a specialist tax firm listed on our list of legal service providers, which is available on our Professional Services webpage:

<http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/service/professional-services.html>

Tax Treatment of Social Security Benefits: Some people have to pay federal income taxes on their Social Security benefits. This usually happens only if you have other substantial income (such as wages, self-employment, interest, dividends and other taxable income that must be reported on your tax return) in addition to your benefits. Please see the Social Security Administration website:

www.socialsecurity.gov/planners/taxes.htm and IRS Publication 915, *Social Security and Equivalent Railroad Retirement Benefits*.

Report of Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts (FBAR): You might have to file this report with the IRS if you have a financial interest in, or signature authority over, one or more financial accounts in a foreign country and the aggregate value of all those accounts exceeds \$10,000 at any time during the calendar year. For details, see the IRS FBAR webpage: <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/article/0,,id=148849,00.html>



Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN): If you have a spouse or dependent who is not eligible for a Social Security number, but needs an identification number for U.S. federal tax purposes, you can get an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) from the IRS. Please see the IRS website for more details:

<http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=96287,00.html>.

To ensure that you receive the ITIN in time for file your taxes on time, please apply for it well in advance. For a fee, the Consulate can certify copies of documents required for the ITIN application. Please make an appointment for "other services" via our appointment website:

<http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/service/appointments/>.

State and Local Taxes: If you are a United States taxpayer abroad, you might also have tax liabilities to one or more states, districts, or territories in the U.S. Please contact the relevant state, district, or territory Department of Revenue or Department of Taxation. A list of these agencies is available at:

<http://www.aicpa.org/yellow/yptsgus.htm>

Routine Consular Services in Chiang Mai

AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES (ACS) HOURS:

- Tuesdays and Thursdays **by appointment only**.
- For additional information and to make an appointment: <http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/service.html>

Selected American Citizen Services and fees:

Notary services: \$50.00 <i>including affidavits for Thai immigration, for getting married in Thailand, or to obtain a Thai driver's license</i>
Minor passport (under age of 16): \$105.00
First Adult Passport (age 16 and over): \$135.00
Adult Passport Renewal: \$110.00
Replacement for a lost or stolen passport: Adult - \$135.00; Minor - \$105.00
Consular Report of Birth Abroad (for children born to American citizens in Thailand): \$100.00

The Consulate accepts U.S. dollars, Thai baht, and Credit cards. We cannot accept checks.

- **Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP):** We encourage American citizens living or traveling in Thailand to sign up at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. In an emergency or crisis, we will use the information you provide to locate you or pass on critical information.
- **Visa Inquiries:** We **cannot** accept inquiries about visas during American Citizen Service hours. If you are an American citizen inquiring on behalf of a visa applicant, please see the Non-Immigrant Visa websites listed below or send an email to: conschiangmai@state.gov.

NON-IMMIGRANT VISA (NIV) HOURS:

- Mondays and Wednesdays **by appointment only**.
- For additional information and to make an appointment: <http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/visas.html>

IMMIGRANT VISAS, FIANCÉE VISAS, AND GREEN CARDS:

These services are handled by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok. Please communicate directly with them by using the contact information below.

USEFUL CONTACT INFORMATION:

United States Government

U.S. Embassy Bangkok	022-054-000	http://bangkok.usembassy.gov
Immigrant Visa Unit (Bangkok)	visasbkk@state.gov	http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/immigrant_visas.html
American Citizen Services (Bangkok)	acsbkk@state.gov	http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/service.html
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services	bkkcis.inquiries@dhs.gov	http://uscis.gov
Electronic System for Travel Authorization (Visa Waiver Program)		https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/
Internal Revenue Service (tax information and forms)		http://www.irs.gov/
Social Security Administration		http://www.ssa.gov
Adoption Information		http://adoption.state.gov

Thai Government

Chiang Mai Tourist Police	1155; 053-247-317	e-mail: tourist@police.go.th
Chiang Mai Immigration Office	053-277-510; 053-282-532	http://www.immigration.go.th
Chiang Mai Customs Office	053-277-695	http://www.customs.go.th/
Animal Quarantine Office	026-534-444	http://www.dld.go.th/