



October 2011

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Consulate Quarterly

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

Message from Consul General Susan N. Stevenson

We hope you were not inundated by the Great Flood of 2011, and our thoughts are with all those who were affected. Secretary Clinton expressed condolences on behalf of the American people on October 7: www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/10/175176.htm.

The U.S. Consulate General – situated next to the Ping River – had to close for two and a half days due to flood waters in our vicinity. We apologize for the inconvenience to those whose appointments needed to be rescheduled. Now that we are dried out, we are looking south and hoping the flood waters recede soon for the rest of the country. You can track how the floods affect the Consulate or Embassy by visiting our respective Facebook pages or following us on Twitter (@USConsChiangMai or @ACSBKK).

Many of you have been following the 2012 election campaign back in the U.S. Although the presidential election is still a year off, many U.S. states are moving their primary elections earlier. We've heard that New Hampshire, traditionally the first primary of the election season, is considering moving its primary to mid-December to keep ahead of the others. To ensure you can participate in these election primaries and caucuses, please remember to update your absentee ballot registrations. If you are unsure how to register, please visit the Federal Voting Assistance Program website at <http://www.fvap.gov>.



**Happy
Thanksgiving!**

Upcoming Consular Section Closures: October 10 and November 24, 2011

The Consulate General's Consular Section will be closed to routine services on Monday, October 10, 2011 (Columbus Day) and Thursday, November 24, 2011 (Thanksgiving Day).

However, we always are available to assist Americans who experience emergencies, such as deaths, arrests, or serious illnesses. In such situations, please contact the Consulate's American Citizen Services unit at 053-107-777.

These closures affect non-emergency services, such as passport issuance (including extra pages and picking up new passports), notariats (including those required for Thai immigration purposes), reports of birth, and federal benefits assistance.

For routine services, please make an appointment on our website.

THE 2012 ELECTION SEASON IS COMING

Time to update your absentee voting registration...

Note: *It might seem that we're publishing this article a bit early. After all, Election Day won't come until November 2012, more than a year away. You're right – our normal advice is to update your absentee voting registration at the beginning of every calendar year. However, for the 2012 election season, U.S. states and territories will be holding primary elections to select party nominees beginning in early 2012. (For the current primary calendar, see www.fvap.gov/vao/calendar.html) If you follow our usual advice, you might miss out on a primary election if you vote in a state that has an early primary, such as Nevada or Florida.*

If you are a United States citizen 18 years or older who resides outside the U.S., you may vote absentee in any election for Federal office. Depending on your U.S. legal state of residence, you also may be able to vote in state or local elections by absentee ballot.

U.S. law makes no provision for in-person voting at U.S. Embassies and Consulates. That is, there will not be a voting booth at the Consulate. If you want to vote, you must vote absentee according to your state's procedures.

Each state administers its own elections, and absentee voting procedures vary by state. In order to vote absentee, your first stop should be the website of Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), which will guide you on the specific requirements for your state or territory: www.fvap.gov.

WHERE DO I VOTE?

Your "legal state of residence" for voting purposes is the state or territory where you last resided immediately before to your departure from the United States. This applies to overseas citizens even if you do not have property or other ties in your last state of residence and your intent to return to that state may be uncertain.

If you are a United States citizen who has never resided in the U.S., you might be able to vote in the legal state of residence of one of your parents. See the FVAP website for further details: www.fvap.gov/reference/nvr-res.html.

HOW DO I REGISTER TO VOTE ABSENTEE?

The easiest way to register and request an absentee ballot is to use the FVAP website, www.fvap.gov, which will guide you on the specific requirements for your state or territory.

Even if you previously registered to vote in your U.S. state of legal residence, you must let state election officials know that you would like an absentee ballot for this election. In general, we recommend that you request an absentee ballot from your state election official at the start of each calendar year, and whenever there is a change of address, change of e-mail address, or change of name. However, if you vote in a state that has early party primaries, you should do this now to make sure there's enough time to receive your primary ballot, vote it, and return it.

When registering, please be sure to use your complete and correct mailing address. That is the address where your state election official will send your absentee ballot. Also, you should provide your email addresses or fax number, to enable state election officials to send election materials in the fastest way possible.

Please do not use the Consulate's address on your voter registration, as we do not have the capacity to hold or forward mail for you. If we receive mail addressed to you at the Consulate, we must return it to the sender, which will delay your receiving the ballot.

NOTARIZING YOUR REGISTRATION REQUEST

Some states require that absentee voter registration requests be witnessed or notarized. The FVAP website (www.fvap.gov) will tell you if it is necessary for your state. If so, we are happy to do it at the Consulate. Please make an appointment for "notarial and other services" on our website, <http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/service/appointments/>. There is no fee for notarizing election materials.

SENDING YOUR REGISTRATION REQUEST

Some states allow you to send your registration request by fax or email. The FVAP website (www.fvap.gov) will tell you if either of these is allowed for your state. If your state allows these, we recommend that you do so, because it means that election materials will reach your state election official more quickly than mailing.

You may mail your completed absentee voter registration from the U.S. Consulate. We accept election materials for mailing during the following hours: 08:00-11:00 and 13:00-15:00 on Tuesdays and Thursdays (except American and Thai holidays). Please do not drop off voting materials with the Consulate's guards – they're not trained to properly handle them.

When you come, please have your voter registration or voted ballot addressed and ready to send (including postage, if required). We will date-stamp your election materials, then put them in the military postal service. It usually takes two weeks for mail to reach its U.S. destination from here. Please take that delay into account -- send election materials early to ensure they reach your state election official by the appropriate deadline.

If you prefer, you may mail election materials yourself using Thailand Post. Again, be sure that you mail it early, and make sure it is postmarked. You also may use a private courier services such as Fedex, UPS, or DHL. However, these services do not provide a postmark, which could affect whether your state election official will accept your ballot after the voting deadline.

FOR ASSISTANCE

The American Citizen Services unit is available to answer questions about absentee voting. To contact us Voting, send an e-mail to acschn@state.gov. If you prefer to come in person, please make an appointment for "notarial and other services" on our website, <http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/service/appointments/>.

Absentee Voting Overview



Appointments Now Required for Routine Service at U.S. Embassies in Bangkok and Vientiane



To ensure consistent and equitable service for the many Americans who live in and visit northern Thailand, the Consulate has an appointment system for non-emergency services for the last three years. Now, all U.S. Embassies and Consulate around the world are doing the same, including Embassy Bangkok and Embassy Vientiane.

We know that many Americans in northern Thailand travel to Bangkok and Vientiane often, and some of you get routine service from our colleagues there, so we wanted to share this information with you. If you're planning a visa run to Vientiane and need to get additional pages in your U.S. passport, don't forget to make an appointment at the U.S. Embassy there!

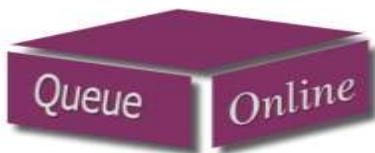
For more information about their services or to schedule an appointment, please see their websites:

- U.S. Embassy Bangkok: <http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/service.html>
- U.S. Embassy Vientiane: <http://laos.usembassy.gov/service.html>

Chiang Mai Immigration Checkpoint Now Scheduling Appointments Online

Our colleagues in Bangkok and Vientiane aren't the only ones who recently introduced appointment systems. The Chiang Mai Immigration Checkpoint recently began allowing clients to schedule a limited number of appointments per day through its "Queue Online" system. We're passing this information on as a service to the many Americans who have business at that office.

According to Immigration, the Queue Online system is meant for clients doing extensions of long-stay visas such as work, marriage, business, education and retirement visas. They ask that you not use it 90-day reporting, re-entry permits, tourist visa extensions or similar matters that can be processed fairly quickly.



To use the Queue Online system:

1. If your web browser has a pop-up blocker, disable it temporarily.
2. Go to the Chiang Mai Immigration website: <http://chiangmaimm.com/>
3. Scroll down to the Queue Online logo (like the one at left) and click on it.
4. Schedule your appointment.

Currently, there are six appointment slots per day, so please reserve with discretion. If you change your mind, please be sure to cancel the appointment to free the slot for others.

If you have trouble with the system, contact Chiang Mai Immigration directly. The officer handling inquiries is Khun Jinmanee Inkham, tel.: 053-201-755/6.



FBAR and FACTA: What are they?

Recently, some of you have been asking us about these unusual acronyms that come from – where else? -- the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). That's right, they involve U.S. federal taxes. Depending on your tax situation, you might have to find out more about there. Here's a quick primer:

FBAR = Report of Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts. Certain taxpayers overseas have to file this report with the IRS if they 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 a calendar year. This requirement has been in effect since the 1970s, but in recent years the IRS has stepped up enforcement. For more information, please see the IRS website:

<http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/article/0,,id=148849,00.html>

FATCA = Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act. Certain taxpayers holding foreign financial assets with an aggregate value exceeding \$50,000 have to report certain information about those assets on Form 8938 that must be attached to the taxpayer's annual tax return. Though this reporting requirement is technically in effect for tax year 2011, IRS Notice 2011-55 suspended it until the IRS can develop and release Form 8938. For more information, please see the IRS website:

<http://www.irs.gov/businesses/corporations/article/0,,id=236664,00.html>

For additional information about U.S. taxes, including links to full details from the IRS, please see the tax page on our website: <http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/service/u.s.-taxes.html>



Want to help? Be a Consulate Warden!

During the Second World War, Air Raid Wardens alerted the public to the imminent threat of enemy air attack. Today, the U.S. Consulate has Wardens to assist us in passing information to Americans in northern Thailand during an emergency, disaster, or threat. Wardens are volunteers who are usually, but not always, American citizens.

To improve our Warden System, we are looking for new Wardens in **Khamphangphet, Sukhothai, and Tak**. We also are seeking a Warden located in Chiang Mai who either works in or has good connections with the **hospitality industry**, to help us get the word out to hotels, guest houses, and other facilities where short-term American visitors might be staying.

If you are interested in volunteering to be a Warden, or know someone in one of the areas above who might make a good Warden, please write us acschn@state.gov. And please pass the word!

WHAT'S GOING ON WITH YOUR WEBSITE?!? (part 3)

In our last issue, we told you about some problems with our appointment website. We reported that it was victim of its own success -- too many people were trying to use it at once, overloading it. (The same system is used by Embassies and Consulates around the world.) Basically, it's like getting a "fast busy" signal when you try to telephone someone.

Well, our IT colleagues in Washington seemed to have fixed that issue by adding more capacity. Unfortunately, over the past month or two, some of you have been experiencing a new problem. When you try to connect, you get an error message that says, "Windows cannot display the page," "page failed to load," or some other variant depending on your browser and operating system. We've been back in touch with our IT colleagues to figure out the problem and come up with a solution.

Here's what's going on: To prevent hackers and criminals from jamming up or breaking in to the appointment website (which has sensitive personal information such as names, dates of birth, and passport numbers), the Department of State's computer staff take active measures to defend it. Among these measures is blocking access requests from certain Internet Protocol (IP) addresses associated with suspicious activity. Unfortunately, many of the IP addresses on the "block" list belong to Thai Internet Service Providers (ISPs), such as 3BB, CAT, and True. Your legitimate connection requests are getting blocked as well.

Here's what to do: If you've tried a few times and can't connect to our appointment website, please send us an email at acschn@state.gov. When you write, please include the following information:

1. Your IP address and the name of your ISP. To find these out, go to <http://whatismyipaddress.com/>. It will tell you your IP address (four numbers separated by periods; for example: 113.53.180.154) and the ISP name.
2. Your full name, your email address, the type of service you need, and when you prefer to come in (Tuesdays or Thursdays).

We'll pass the IP and ISP information on to our IT people in Washington so they can remove them from the "block" list. And we'll schedule you for an appointment at the first available time.

Again, we're sorry for the inconvenience, and thanks for your patience as we resolve these issues. Please keep letting us know when you encounter problems -- that's how we know to fix them.

Did someone else pass this issue of the Consulate Quarterly to you?

We send it out four times a year to everyone in northern Thailand who signed up with the Department of State's online Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). STEP is a free, U.S. government-provided service for Americans traveling or living in a foreign country that allows you to record information about your trip or foreign residence. In an emergency or crisis, we will use the information you provide to locate you or pass on critical information.

To receive the Consulate Quarterly and other useful information from the Consulate, sign up with STEP today: <http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/service/smart-traveler-enrollment-program-step.html>.

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

- **American Citizen Registration:** We encourage American citizens living or traveling in Thailand to register with the Consulate online: <https://travelregistration.state.gov>
- **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>
 - <http://thailand.us-visaservices.com/>

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:

<i>United States Government</i>		
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