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Consulate Quarterly

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

Holiday Message from the Consulate General

The 4th of July is a very important holiday for most Americans. We all have many fond memories of fish fries and barbecues, fireworks, and lazy summer days at the beach or the swimming pool with families and friends. It is also a time to reflect on what it means to be an American and why there are so many reasons to be proud of our heritage.

Independence Day is particularly meaningful for those Americans who find themselves overseas on the holiday. To whatever extent you may feel welcome living in or visiting Thailand, enjoying its rich traditions and heritage, the Fourth is an opportunity to reconnect with your fellow Americans, call your family back home and say, "You know, I really am proud to be an American!"

The fourth reminds us what our founding fathers achieved as patriots who fought for our freedoms and who inspired democratic values at home and abroad. We can all be proud that their legacy has been recognized worldwide and that so many nations now acknowledge an individual's rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

So this year, as we mark the birthday of the USA in Thailand, let's all be proud to make it a celebration of our common humanity. It is a very special day for us all.

*Happy Independence
Day - July 4*



Consular Section Closed for Routine Services July 4

The Consular section will be closed for **routine** services July 4, 2012. However, we are always available to assist Americans who experience emergencies, such as deaths, arrests, or serious illnesses. In such situations, please contact our duty officer at 01-881-1878.

Wednesday's 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). For routine services, please make an appointment at our website, <http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/service/appointments/>.

Overseas Voting



New absentee voting laws are in effect for the 2012 elections. You will no longer automatically receive ballots based on a previous absentee ballot request. All U.S. citizens outside the United States who want to vote by absentee ballot in the 2012 primary and general elections must complete a new Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) every year if they wish to vote from abroad. It's easy to do – To start the process, just go to www.FVAP.gov, the website of the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP). FVAP is the official U.S. government website for overseas absentee voting information. For more information and guidance, [please follow this link](#).

FVAP can also be reached by phone: Toll free number from Thailand is **001-800-12-0664536**.

Be an active voter. Start thinking about your participation in the U.S. 2012 elections today! [Read More](#)

CONTACTING THE VOTING ASSISTANCE OFFICER AT THE U.S. EMBASSY BANGKOK

If you have questions not answered by the above provided links, or require forms or additional information, you may contact the Voting Assistance Officer at Embassy Bangkok by email at VoteBangkok@state.gov or by phone at 02-205-4049.

Safe Bicycling in Chiang Mai

by David Hardcastle

One of the most convenient and low-cost ways to get around Chiang Mai city is by bicycle, and there are a wide range of low cost rental shops.

Three main areas of “The Rose of the North” attract visitors: the Night Bazaar (handicraft shopping), Nimmanhemmin Road (night-time restaurant-land) and Thapae Gate (huge choice of low cost day and night restaurants and shops). It’s around Thapae Gate and the main Moon Muang Road there that you will find bike rentals.



Setting a good example: Walking bikes across a complex intersection.

The bikes tend to be the old-fashioned looking “sit up and beg” variety, but the high handlebars mean you will have good visibility to see the sights and avoid the accidents. Let’s focus on the latter!!

On the road, there’s a “pecking order.” First thing to be aware of – and beware of – in Thailand is that there is an unofficial but universal hierarchy of road users. Top of the pile are the drivers of prestige sedans, buses and trucks. Whether or not we like it, “might is right” on the roads here, and almost all

drivers of more mundane vehicles give way to them, rightly or wrongly. Motorcyclists come next, followed by cyclists and then the lowest of the low, the humble pedestrians.

So make no mistake about this, when you ride a bicycle in Thailand, you are only one small step above the walkers. We have even seen saffron-robed Buddhist monks having to run for it as they cross the roads!

You therefore owe it to yourself to check the brakes of the bike *before* you rent it, a warning bell or horn on the handlebars and ideally – but rarely – a pair of rear-view mirrors. In their absence, never hesitate to glance over your shoulder before holding out an arm and making a turn. Safety helmets are, of course, strongly recommended.

Experienced Western road users here recommend strongly against riding at night. Lights, even reflectors, are seldom found on rental bikes in Thailand. Ask for lights front and rear *if* you plan on riding in darkness, or wear a safety vest or belt that has a flashing light in the rear. And, of course, always wear white at night.

Left is right. The strongest, most fundamental advice, however, is also the very simplest: **KEEP LEFT!!**



Another good example: Pausing and looking in the direction of

In recent years there has been a tendency for visitors (almost never residents!) to deliberately ride on the right, **against** the traffic flow. When asked, some say they've read or been told to do this so they can easily see traffic coming towards them.

This is sheer folly. Not only do oncoming drivers not *expect* to see you coming head-on (and many do not “read the road” very far ahead), but drivers coming out of side roads will simply not *expect* you to be there, approaching them from the wrong direction. The same applies to pedestrians trying to cross the road. They will *not* be looking your way.

The same applies to one-way streets. Respect them and stay safe, even if it means riding round the block. Chiang Mai has many one-way streets, and some have narrow contra-flow lanes marked out for bikes and motorcycles. Use these if you wish, but do still take maximum care.



Be alert! Overloaded mopeds and other traffic can come from any direction – even when there's no through traffic.

Last and not least, making a right turn at a busy intersection is a challenge for any driver or rider suddenly thrown into a nation that drives on “the wrong side of the road.” It's often better to stop on the left, watch for a gap and then walk the bike across.

Better to miss a few sights than to see the inside of the hospital!

The writer, who is well-known to many of us around Chiang Mai, is accident-free resident here for seventeen years and a class 1 driver in the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, UK.



DIRECT DEPOSIT:

From the U.S. Treasury, Straight to You!

The deadline to register for Direct Deposit of Social Security is: **March 1, 2013**

Are you tired of waiting and waiting to receive your monthly Social Security, Veterans Administration, or other U.S. federal benefit check? Do you get frustrated when the Consulate tells you that the checks haven't arrived yet?

If you sign up for Direct Deposit, the U.S. Treasury will deposit the money directly into your bank account every month. Because there is no paper check, you don't have to pick it up at the Consulate or wait for it to show up in the mail. It cannot be delayed in transit, lost, or stolen. You do not have to cash it or deposit it at the bank. Instead, the money will be in your bank account at the same time every month. Also, you don't have to worry about your check if you travel or move.

Because of these advantages, the U.S. Treasury encourages everyone who receives a monthly check from the U.S. government to sign up for Direct Deposit. We can help you with this.

For more information and to learn how to get started, visit the Federal Benefits page of our website, available at: <http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/service/u.s.-federal-benefit-information.html>

STEP Enrollment

All U.S. citizens in Thailand are urged to enroll online in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). Registering gives U.S. citizens access to updated information on travel and security notices within Thailand and makes it easier for the Embassy to contact citizens in case of emergency.

Go to: <https://step.state.gov>

Why can't I just call to make an appointment? That's a good question. And there's a good answer: resources. To provide quality service by phone, we would have to dedicate one of our staff to do nothing but handle the phone. But taking that person away from other duties would mean scheduling fewer appointments per day and making Americans wait longer for service. Instead, we use the web-based appointment system as our "scheduling robot." It allows us to more productively use our local staff to serve the many thousands of Americans who visit and live in northern Thailand.

Medical Insurance

You can't assume your insurance will go with you when you travel. It's very important to find out **before** you leave. You should ask your insurance company two questions:

- (1) Does my policy apply when I'm outside the United States?**
- (2) Will it cover emergencies like a trip to a foreign hospital or an evacuation?**

In many places, doctors and hospitals still expect payment in cash at the time of service. You can't simply give them your insurance card and expect it will go through. If your policy doesn't go with you when you travel, it's a very good idea to purchase a separate policy for your trip.

Obtaining medical treatment and hospital care abroad can be expensive, and medical evacuation to the U.S. can cost more than \$100,000. U.S. medical insurance is generally not accepted outside the United States, and Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid do not provide coverage for hospital or any medical expenses outside the United States.

Check with your health insurance provider to see if and in which circumstances and countries you will be covered overseas. Your health insurance provider may also require you to provide notification of your travel before you depart the United States and for any treatment before it's provided. If your insurance policy does not cover you abroad, it is a good idea to consider purchasing a short-term policy that does. Many companies offer specifically designed short-term health and emergency assistance policies to cover health care expenses incurred overseas, including emergency services such as medical evacuations.

One sure way to ruin your travel is to lose money because an emergency forces you to postpone or cancel your trip. Except for tickets on regularly scheduled airlines, almost any travel package you purchase will have a penalty for cancellation, and some companies give no refund at all. Take careful note of the cancellation policies for your travel providers and consider purchasing trip or travel insurance

For more information, including lists of insurance providers and medical evacuation services available, see the State Dept. website at: http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1470.html

Thai Legalization Office Opens in Chiang Mai

For those of you who have ever had travel all the way to Bangkok just to have the Ministry of Foreign Affairs “legalize” a document, this is some good news. The Ministry has opened a legalization office at the Chiang Mai Provincial Hall offering the following services:

- Certified genuine signature 200 baht
- Certified true copy of document issued by Thai authorities 200 baht
- Certified true copy of civil and family registration document 200 baht
- Certified translation of judicial document:
 - First 100 words 200 baht
 - Next 100 words or remainder 200 baht

The office is open from Monday-Friday, 08:30-16:30, except official holidays. Service usually takes two work days. Service via post also is available.

For further details, contact them at:

Legalization Division
Department of Consular Affairs
Chiang Mai Provincial Hall Building
Chotana Road, T.Chang Puek
A. Muang, Chiang Mai 50000
Tel.: 053-112-748, 053-112-749, or 053-112-750

In addition, their office in Bangkok remains open:

Legalization Division
Department of Consular Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
123 Chaeng Wattana Road, 3rd Floor
Tung Song Hong, Laksi, Bangkok
Tel.: 02-575-1056 or 02-575-1057

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

including affidavits for Thai immigration, for getting married in Thailand, or to obtain a Thai driver's license

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: \$135.00

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/