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*In this Issue:*

- Message from the Consul General
- Consular Section Closure for Songkran
- Songkran Safety
- Tax Time is Coming...
- Air Quality Alert
- Did Your Social Security Benefit Stop?
- Election Day is Coming
- Introducing... Lanna Care Net
- Routine Consular Services in Chiang Mai

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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*

## Message from Consul General Ken Foster

Warmest greetings to all Americans in northern Thailand! I have now been in Chiang Mai for two months and am learning why so many of you have decided to make your lives here. Although I've lived in Bangkok for a total of 11 years, and have visited northern Thailand dozens of times previously, living here has given me a whole new appreciation for the opportunities, as well as the challenges, of life up here. In spite of the recent air quality, I'm still finding northern Thailand a "breath of fresh air" in so many other ways. Hopefully, we'll be back to blue skies in the near future, but in the meantime, please take some time to read our advice on page 4 on ways to protect yourself and your family when the air gets bad.

Tax season and Songkran are also nearly here, and we've got some good information in this newsletter to keep you safe, healthy, and out of trouble. Remember that even if you aren't required to pay any taxes, you may still be required to file a tax return!

Since 2012 is an election year, and there are many close races out there, your votes will count more than ever, so please don't forget to register and vote by absentee ballot if you won't be back in the U.S. on election day.

I will be serving here in Chiang Mai until next summer (2013) and look forward to meeting as many of you as possible. Until our paths cross, I wish everyone a happy and healthy 2012.

## Consular Section Closed for Routine Services April 12, 2012

The Consular section will be closed for **routine** services during the Songkran holiday, including April 12. 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.

The April 12 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. For these routine services, please make an appointment at our website, <http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/service/appointments/>.

We wish you and your family a happy and safe Songkran. *Sawat dii pii mai!*

# 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 or someone you know is injured in an accident, call 1669 for an ambulance. 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 1669 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 to 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!)

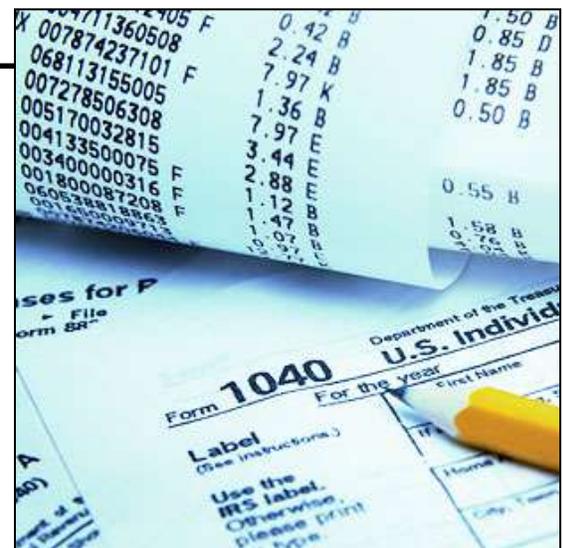
### SOME USEFUL THAI FOR EMERGENCIES

- 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*

## 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. Taxpayers outside the United States get an automatic extension until June 15 to file their tax returns. Still, it might take a while to get everything you need to file your return, so we recommend that you get started early. Not sure where to begin? Have a look at our U.S. Taxes webpage:

<http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/service/u.s.-taxes.html>



### ***Do you have a spouse or dependent (such as an adopted child) who isn't a U.S. citizen?***

If you have a spouse or dependent who does not have a Social Security number, you will need an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) to list that person on your tax returns. You get the ITIN from the IRS, not the Social Security Administration. Please see the ITIN information on our U.S. Taxes webpage, which will point you in the right direction. To ensure that you receive the ITIN early enough to file your taxes on time, we recommend that you apply for it well in advance.

# AIR QUALITY ALERT

**Note:** We have information about poor air quality in the [Medical Facilities and Health Information section of the Thailand Country-Specific Information sheet](#), the Department of State's official advice to Americans in Thailand. This article expands on the information there.

Every year, Chiang Mai and other areas of northern Thailand experience periods of unhealthy air during the dry season until the beginning of the rainy season in May. (Although last year was happily – and unusually -- clear due to unseasonable wind and rain.) 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. You should be aware of the local Air Quality Index (AQI) and take appropriate measures to minimize the impact on your family's health.



## HOW DO I CHECK THE AQI?

The Thai government's Pollution Control Department calculates the AQI daily for various locations around the country and posts them on its website. Go to [www.agmthai.com](http://www.agmthai.com) and click on the blue "AQI" tab near the top. If you are in or near Chiang Mai city, look for the AQI for station 35t "City Hall Chiangmai" (in fact, this is the Provincial Hall located about 5km north of the old city, near the 700 Year Stadium) or station 36t "Yupparaj" (Yupparaj Wittayalai, a high school inside the moat in the old city).

## WHAT DOES THE AQI NUMBER MEAN?

Here's the explanation from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s website, <http://airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=aqibasics.aqi> (Note that the color codes on the U.S. EPA website do not correspond to the color codes on the Thai government site. However, the AQI number is calculated the same way on both sites.)

- **"Good" AQI is 0-50.** Air quality is considered satisfactory, and air pollution poses little or no risk.
- **"Moderate" AQI is 51-100.** 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.
- **"Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups" AQI is 101-150.** Although general public is not likely to be affected at this AQI 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.
- **"Unhealthy" AQI is 151-200.** Everyone may begin to experience some adverse health effects, and members of the sensitive groups may experience more serious effects.

- **"Very Unhealthy" AQI is 201-300.** This would trigger a health alert signifying that everyone may experience more serious health effects.
- **"Hazardous" AQI is greater than 300.** This would trigger health warnings of emergency conditions. The entire population is more likely to be affected.

### WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN THE AQI IS HIGH?

To protect yourself and your 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 outside. 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, which 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.



*View across Chiang Mai city the evening of March 3. The red line in the top middle is a line of fires in the hills west of town.*

## Did Your Social Security Benefit Stop Suddenly?

If you normally receive a monthly benefit from the Social Security Administration (SSA) and it didn't arrive last month, it's likely that SSA didn't receive your completed Form 7162. If you live outside the U.S., SSA sends you this form periodically. You complete it and return it to SSA to confirm that you're still eligible to receive benefits. SSA sends it to the address they have on file, so if you moved recently but didn't update your address with SSA, they might have sent it to your old address.

If this happened to you, contact the SSA regional office in Manila to confirm your current address and request that they restart your benefit:

- E-mail: [fbu.manila@ssa.gov](mailto:fbu.manila@ssa.gov)
- Telephone: +63-2-301-2000, extension 9, then extension 2

## Election Day is November 6, 2012. Are you registered to vote?

See: <http://chiangmai.usconsulate.gov/service/voting-assistance.html>

# 2012 Election Dates

## OVER HERE, OVER THERE, DON'T DESPAIR - VOTE!

This chart lists the 2012 State primary election dates in all the States, the District of Columbia and U.S. Territories; primary runoff dates (if applicable); States with U.S. Senate races; number of U.S. Representative seats up for re-election; and Governorial races. The General Election is Tuesday, November 6, 2012.

State	Presidential Primary	State Primary	State Runoff Primary (if necessary)	General Election		
				Federal		State
				U.S. Senate	U.S. Representative	Governor
Alabama	MARCH 13	MARCH 13	APRIL 24	NO	7	NO
Alaska	***	AUGUST 28	-----	NO	1	NO
American Samoa	***	-----	-----	---	1 DELEGATE	YES
Arizona	FEBRUARY 28	AUGUST 28	-----	YES	9	NO
Arkansas	MAY 22	MAY 22	JUNE 12	NO	4	NO
California	JUNE 5	JUNE 5	-----	YES	53	NO
Colorado	***	JUNE 26	-----	NO	7	NO
Connecticut	APRIL 24	AUGUST 14	-----	YES	5	NO
Delaware	APRIL 24	SEPTEMBER 11	-----	YES	1	YES
District of Columbia	APRIL 3	APRIL 3	-----	---	1 DELEGATE	NO
Florida	JANUARY 31	AUGUST 14	-----	YES	27	NO
Georgia	MARCH 6	JULY 31	AUGUST 21	NO	13	NO
Guam	N/A	SEPTEMBER 1	-----	---	1 DELEGATE	NO
Hawaii	***	AUGUST 11	-----	YES	2	NO
Idaho	MAY 15	MAY 15	-----	NO	2	NO
Illinois	MARCH 20	MARCH 20	-----	YES	18	NO
Indiana	MAY 8	MAY 8	-----	YES	9	YES
Iowa	***	JUNE 5	-----	NO	4	NO
Kansas	***	AUGUST 7	-----	NO	4	NO
Kentucky	MAY 22	MAY 22	-----	NO	6	NO
Louisiana	MARCH 24	MARCH 24	DECEMBER 1	NO	6	NO
Maine	***	JUNE 12	-----	YES	2	NO
Maryland	APRIL 3	APRIL 3	-----	YES	8	NO
Massachusetts	MARCH 6	SEPTEMBER 6	-----	YES	9	NO
Michigan	FEBRUARY 28	AUGUST 7	-----	YES	14	NO
Minnesota	***	AUGUST 14	-----	YES	8	NO
Mississippi	MARCH 13	MARCH 13	APRIL 3	YES	4	NO
Missouri	FEBRUARY 7	AUGUST 7	-----	YES	8	YES
Montana	JUNE 5	JUNE 5	-----	YES	1	YES
Nebraska	MAY 15	MAY 15	-----	YES	3	NO
Nevada	***	JUNE 12	-----	YES	4	NO
New Hampshire	JANUARY 10	SEPTEMBER 11	-----	NO	2	YES
New Jersey	JUNE 5	JUNE 5	-----	YES	12	NO
New Mexico	JUNE 5	JUNE 5	-----	YES	3	NO
New York	APRIL 24	SEPTEMBER 11	-----	YES	27	NO
North Carolina	MAY 8	MAY 8	JULY 17	NO	13	YES
North Dakota	***	JUNE 12	-----	YES	1	YES
Ohio	JUNE 12	MARCH 6/JUNE 12	-----	YES	16	NO
Oklahoma	MARCH 6	JUNE 26	AUGUST 28	NO	5	NO
Oregon	MAY 15	MAY 15	-----	NO	5	NO
Pennsylvania	APRIL 24	APRIL 24	-----	YES	18	NO
Puerto Rico	***	MARCH 18	-----	---	1 RESIDENT COMM.	YES
Rhode Island	APRIL 24	SEPTEMBER 11	-----	YES	2	NO
South Carolina	REP: JANUARY 21	JUNE 12	JUNE 26	NO	7	NO
South Dakota	JUNE 5	JUNE 5	JUNE 19	NO	1	NO
Tennessee	MARCH 6	AUGUST 2	-----	YES	9	NO
Texas	MARCH 6	MARCH 6	MAY 22	YES	36	NO
Utah	***	JUNE 26	-----	YES	4	YES
Vermont	MARCH 6	AUGUST 28	-----	YES	1	YES
Virgin Islands	***	SEPTEMBER 11	-----	---	1 DELEGATE	NO
Virginia	MARCH 6	JUNE 12	-----	YES	11	NO
Washington	N/A	AUGUST 7	-----	YES	10	YES
West Virginia	MAY 8	MAY 8	-----	YES	3	YES
Wisconsin	APRIL 3	AUGUST 14	-----	YES	8	NO
Wyoming	TBD	AUGUST 21	-----	YES	1	NO

\*\*\* State Caucus

Note: Election information is current as of December 2011. Check your State election website or [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov) for additional details and updates.

## *Introducing...*

# Lanna Care Net

Helping ageing foreigners live safe and healthy lives in Northern Thailand.

## What is Lanna Care Net?

It is a group of people who help ageing foreigners live safe and healthy lives in Chiang Mai and surrounding areas. We do this by providing advice and practical assistance where necessary.

## What do we do?

**We** identify those in need, or at risk, either directly or through third parties.

**We** assist people by counseling, giving advice, offering practical help and contacting other individuals and organisations which can help.

**We** advise and educate people so they may avoid problems associated with ageing.

**We** will provide emergency assistance when necessary.

**We** assist people both in the short and the long term, according to need.

**We** train and educate our members so they become more effective.

## What don't we do?

**We** cannot provide financial assistance but will help people obtain financial assistance where they are eligible.

**We** cannot provide medical or nursing care but can advise clients where suitable support may be found.

Foreigners in an emergency or life-threatening situation call: **089 700 4486** (24 hours)

For enquiries and general support call: **085 709 8801** (9 to 5 only)

Or contact us by e-mail: **[lannacarenet@gmail.com](mailto:lannacarenet@gmail.com)**

**Lanna Care Net is not a program of the Consulate or U.S. government, but rather a local network of concerned individuals and organizations involved in assisting aging foreigners here. We're proud to be a member of Lanna Care Net, and we hope that it will help us better serve the many older Americans in our community.**

# 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](mailto: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:

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

<b>Thai Government</b>		
Chiang Mai Tourist Police	1155; 053-247-317	e-mail: <a href="mailto:tourist@police.go.th">tourist@police.go.th</a>
Chiang Mai Immigration Office	053-277-510; 053-282-532	<a href="http://www.immigration.go.th">http://www.immigration.go.th</a>
Chiang Mai Customs Office	053-277-695	<a href="http://www.customs.go.th/">http://www.customs.go.th/</a>
Animal Quarantine Office	026-534-444	<a href="http://www.dld.go.th/">http://www.dld.go.th/</a>