



Thai QuickChat

Learning some Thai is indispensable for travel in the kingdom; naturally, the more you pick up, the closer you get to Thailand's culture and people. There are so few foreigners who speak Thai in Thailand that it doesn't take much to impress most Thais with a few words in their own language. Listen closely to the way the Thais themselves use the various tones and you'll catch on quickly. Don't let laughter at your linguistic forays discourage you – this apparent amusement is really an expression of appreciation.

QUESTION WORDS

How?	อย่างไร	yàhng rai
What?	อะไร	à-rai
When?	เมื่อไร	meua-rai
Where?	ที่ไหน	têe nǎi
Who?	ใคร	kra

CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

Hello	สวัสดี (ครับ/ค่ะ)	sà-wát-dii (khráp/khâ)
Goodbye	ลาก่อน	laa kàwn
Yes	ใช่	châi
No	ไม่ใช่	mǎi châi
Please	กรุณา	kà-rú-naa
Thank you	ขอบคุณ	khàwp khun
That's fine/You're welcome	ไม่เป็นไร/ยินดี	mǎi pen rai/yin-dii
Excuse me	ขออภัย	khǎw à-phai
Sorry	ขอโทษ	khǎw thót
What's your name?	คุณชื่ออะไร?	khun chêu à-rai?
My name is ...	ผมชื่อ... (men) ดิฉันชื่อ... (women)	phôm chêu ... di-chǎn chêu ...
Where are you from?	มาจากไหน	maa jàak nǎi
I'm from ...	มาจาก...	maa jàak ...
I don't like ...	ไม่ชอบ...	mǎi chǎwp ...
Just a minute	รอเดี๋ยว	raw dǐaw

DIRECTIONS

Where is ...?	...อยู่ที่ไหน?	... yùu thǐi nǎi?
Go straight ahead	ตรงไป	trong pai
Turn left	เลี้ยวซ้าย	lǐaw sǎai
Turn right	เลี้ยวขวา	lǐaw khwǎa
at the next corner	ตรงมุม	trong mum
at the traffic lights	ตรงไฟแดง	trong fai daeng

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

Do you speak English?	คุณพูดภาษาอังกฤษได้ไหม	khun phùut phaa-sǎa ang-krit dǎi mǎi
How do you say ... in Thai?	... ว่าอย่างไรภาษาไทย	... wǎa yàng rai phaa-sǎa thai
What does ... mean?	... แปลว่าอะไร	... plae wǎa à-rai
I don't understand	ไม่เข้าใจ	mǎi khǎo jai

TIME & DATES

What time is it?	กี่โมงแล้ว?	kii mohng láew?
today	วันนี้	wan nii
tomorrow	พรุ่งนี้	phrúng nii
yesterday	เมื่อวาน	mêua waan
Monday	วันจันทร์	wan jan
Tuesday	วันอังคาร	wan ang-khaan
Wednesday	วันพุธ	wan phút
Thursday	วันพฤหัสบดี	wan phá-réu-hát
Friday	วันศุกร์	wan sùk
Saturday	วันเสาร์	wan sǎo
Sunday	วันอาทิตย์	wan aa-thít

SHOPPING & SERVICES

I'd like to buy ...	อยากจะซื้อ...	yàak jà séu ...
How much is it?	เท่าไร	thào rai?
I don't like it	ไม่ชอบ	mǎi chǎwp
May I look at it?	ดูได้ไหม	duu dǎi mǎi
I'm just looking	ดูเฉยๆ	duu chǎe chǎe
It's cheap	ราคาถูก	raa-khaa thùuk
It's too expensive	แพงเกินไป	phaeng koen pai
I'll take it	เอา	ao
Do you accept credit cards?	รับบัตรเครดิตไหม	ráp bàt khreh-dít mǎi

PLACES

the church	โบสถ์คริสต์	bòht khrit
the city centre	ใจกลางเมือง	jai klaang meuang
the embassy	สถานทูต	à-thǎn thút
the market	ตลาด	ta-làat
the museum	พิพิธภัณฑ	phí-phít-thá-phan
the post office	ไปรษณีย์	prai-sà-nii
a public toilet	ห้องน้ำสาธารณะ	hǎwng nám sǎa-thaa-rá-ná
the tourist office	สำนักงานท่องเที่ยว	sǎm-nák ngaan thǎwng thǎaw

TRANSPORT

What time does the ... leave?	... จะออกกี่โมง	... jà àwk kii mohng
What time does the ... arrive?	... จะถึงกี่โมง	... jà thǎung kii mohng
boat	เรือ	reua
bus	รถเมล์/รถบัส	rót meh/rót bát
plane	เครื่องบิน	khreuang bin
train	รถไฟ	rót fai
I'd like a ticket	อยากได้ตั๋ว	yàak dǎi túa
I want to go to ...	อยากจะไป...	yàak jà pai ...
The train has been cancelled	รถไฟถูกยกเลิกแล้ว	rót fai thùuk yok lǎek láew
The train has been delayed	รถไฟจะช้าเวลา	rót fai jà chǎa weh-laa
ticket office	ตู้ขายตั๋ว	túu khǎi túa
timetable	ตารางเวลา	taa-raang weh-laa
train station	สถานีรถไฟ	sa-thǎa-nii rót fai

EMERGENCIES

Help!	ช่วยด้วย	chúay dǔay!
I'm lost	ฉันหลงทาง	chǎn lǒng thaang
Go away!	ไปซิ	pai si!
Call ...!	เรียก... หน่อย	ríak ... nõy
a doctor	หมอ	mǎw
the police	ตำรวจ	tam-rúat

SIGNS

Entrance	ที่เข้า
Exit	ที่ออก
Information	ที่ติดต่อสอบถาม
Open	เปิด
Closed	ปิด
Prohibited	ห้าม
Police Station	สถานีตำรวจ
Toilets	ห้องน้ำ

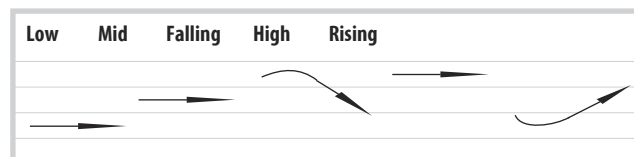


TONES

In Thai the meaning of a single syllable may be altered by means of different tones – in standard Central Thai there are five: low tone, level or mid tone, falling tone, high tone and rising tone. For example, depending on the tone, the syllable *mai* can mean ‘new’, ‘burn’, ‘wood’, ‘not?’ or ‘not’; ponder the phrase *mái mài mãi mãi* (New wood doesn’t burn, does it?) and you begin to appreciate the importance of tones in spoken Thai.

This makes it a rather tricky language to learn at first, especially for those of us unaccustomed to the concept of tones. Even when we ‘know’ what the correct tone in Thai should be, our tendency to denote emotion, verbal stress, the interrogative etc through tone modulation often interferes with producing the correct tone. Therefore the first rule in learning to speak Thai is to divorce emotions from your speech, at least until you’ve learned the Thai way to express them without changing essential tone value.

The following is visual representation in chart form to show relative tone values:



Below is a brief attempt to explain the tones. The only way to really understand the differences is by listening to a native or fluent non-native speaker. The range of all five tones is relative to each speaker’s vocal range so there is no fixed ‘pitch’ intrinsic to the language.

low tone – ‘flat’ like the mid tone, but pronounced at the relative bottom of one’s vocal range. It is low, level and with no inflection, eg *bàat* (baht – the Thai currency).

level or mid tone – pronounced ‘flat’, at the relative middle of the speaker’s vocal range, eg *dii* (good); no tone mark is used.

falling tone – sounds as if you are emphasising a word, or calling someone’s name from afar, eg *mâi* (no/not).

high tone – usually the most difficult for Westerners. It’s pronounced near the relative top of the vocal range, as level as possible, eg *máa* (horse).

rising tone – sounds like the inflection used by English speakers to imply a question – ‘Yes?’, eg *săam* (three).

PRONUNCIATION

The following is a guide to the phonetic system that’s been used for the words and phrases in this guide. It’s based on the Royal Thai General System (RTGS). The dots indicate syllable breaks within words.

CONSONANTS

The majority of consonants correspond closely to their English counterparts. Here are a few exceptions:

- k** as the ‘k’ in ‘skin’; similar to the ‘g’ in ‘good’, but unaspirated (ie with no accompanying puff of air); similar to English ‘g’ but unvoiced (ie with no vibration in the vocal chords)
- p** as the ‘p’ in ‘stopper’, unvoiced and unaspirated (not like the ‘p’ in ‘put’); actually sounds closer to an English ‘b’, its voiced equivalent
- t** as the ‘t’ in ‘forty’, unaspirated; similar to ‘d’ but unvoiced
- kh** as the ‘k’ in ‘kite’, aspirated (ie with an audible puff of air)
- ph** as the ‘p’ in ‘pie’, aspirated (not to be confused with the ‘ph’ in ‘phone’)
- th** as the ‘t’ in ‘tie’, aspirated
- ng** as the ‘nging’ in ‘singing’; can occur as an initial consonant (practise by saying ‘singing’ without the ‘si’)
- r** similar to the ‘r’ in ‘run’ but flapped (ie the tongue touches palate); in everyday speech often pronounced like ‘l’

VOWELS

- i** as the ‘i’ in ‘it’
- ii** as the ‘ee’ in ‘feet’
- ai** as the ‘i’ in ‘pipe’
- aa** as the ‘a’ in ‘father’
- a** half as long as aa, as the ‘a’ in ‘about’
- ae** as the ‘a’ in ‘bat’ or ‘tab’
- e** as the ‘e’ in ‘hen’
- eh** as the ‘ai’ in ‘air’
- oe** as the ‘er’ in ‘fern’ (without the ‘r’ sound)
- u** as the ‘u’ in ‘put’
- uu** as the ‘oo’ in ‘food’
- eu** as the ‘u’ in ‘fur’ (without the ‘r’ sound)
- ao** as the ‘ow’ in ‘now’
- aw** as the ‘aw’ in ‘jaw’ or ‘prawn’
- o** as the ‘o’ in ‘bone’
- oh** as the ‘o’ in ‘toe’
- eua** a combination of eu and a
- ia** as ‘ee-ya’, or as the ‘ie’ in French rien
- ua** as the ‘our’ in ‘tour’
- uay** sounds like ‘oo-way’
- iu** as the ‘ew’ in ‘new’
- iaw** as the ‘io’ in ‘Rio’
- aew** like the ‘a’ in ‘cat’ followed by a short ‘u’ as in ‘put’
- ehw** as ‘air-oooh’
- awy** as the ‘oi’ in ‘coin’