

# Versatility in Hospitality Industry Around the Globe

## A Case Study on Cuisine and Culture of Thailand

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**Abstract:** *Thai cooking places emphasis on lightly prepared dishes with strong aromatic components and a spicy edge. Australian chef David Thompson, an expert on Thai food, observes that unlike many other cuisines, Thai cooking is “about the juggling of disparate elements to create a harmonious finish. Like a complex musical chord it’s got to have a smooth surface but it doesn’t matter what’s happening underneath. Simplicity isn’t the dictum here, at all.” Traditional Thai cuisine loosely falls into four categories: tom (boiled dishes), yam (spicy salads), tam (pounded foods), and gaeng (curries). Deep-fries, stir-fries, and steamed dishes derive from Chinese cuisine.*

*Regional variations*

- *Bangkok: cuisine of the Bangkok metropolitan area, with Teochew and Portuguese influences. In addition, as a capital city, Bangkok cuisine is sometimes influenced by more dedicated royal cuisine. Tastes and looks of food in Bangkok have changed somewhat over time as they have been influenced by other cuisines such as Asian, European or Western countries.*
- *Central Thai: cuisine of the flat and wet central rice-growing plains, site of the former Thai kingdoms of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya, and the Dvaravati culture of the Mon people from before the arrival of Siamese in the area. Coconut milk is one of the major ingredients used in Central Thai cuisine.*
- *Isan or northeastern Thai: cuisine of the more arid Khorat Plateau, similar in culture to Laos and also influenced by Khmer cuisine.*
- *Northern Thai: cuisine of the cooler valleys and forested mountains of the Thai highlands, once ruled by the former Lanna Kingdom and home of Lannaese, the majority of northern Thailand. This cuisine shares many ingredients with Isan.*
- *Southern Thai: cuisine of the Kra Isthmus which is bordered on two sides by tropical seas, with its many islands and including the ethnic Malay, former Sultanate of Pattani in the deep south. The complex curries, food preparation techniques and usage of chillies and spices in Southern Thai cuisine form a great influence on the whole cuisine in general..*

**Keywords:** Cuisine, Market, Tradition

### I. INTRODUCTION

Thai cuisine and the culinary traditions and cuisines of Thailand’s neighbors, especially India, Cambodia, Malaysia and Indonesia, have mutually influence one another over the course of many centuries. [2]

According to the Thai monk Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikku’s writing, ‘India’s Benevolence to Thailand’, Thai cuisine was influenced by Indian cuisine. He wrote that Thai people learned how to use spices in their food in various ways from Indians. Thais also obtained the methods of making herbal medicines from the Indians. Some plants like sarabhi of the family Guttiferae, panika or harsingar, phikun or Mimusops elengi and bunnak or the rose chestnut etc. were brought from India. According to a book ‘Mae Krua Hua Pa’ (first published in 1908) by Lady Plain Bhaskar Wongse, she found that Thai cuisine had had a strong gastronomical cultural line from Sukhothai (1238–1448) through Ayutthaya (1351–1767) and Thonburi period (1767–1782) vis-à-vis Siamese governmental officers’ daily routines (such as royal cooking) and their related cousins. Notedly, Thai food during the Thonburi period tended to be more similar to the Ayutthaya period, except the addition of Chinese food resulted from her prosperous international trade.

## II. THAI CUISINE

An Amazing Balance of Sweet, Sour, Bitter & Salty. Thailand is known for its amazing balance of sweet, sour, bitter, and salty flavors often finished with aromatic herbs. Thai food has been influenced by many cultures including India, China and Portugal. The Thais have incorporated these influences into their cuisine for centuries to create their own unique dishes. Being a large agricultural country, the food of Thailand is both regional and seasonal. For example, in the Isaan region there is an abundance of bitter herbs paired with pungent dipping sauces and sticky rice. In the south, on the other hand, there are more sweet curries and seafood paired with Jasmine rice. Thailand has a substantial Buddhist community which has impacted their cuisine as well.

### Thai Meals are a Social Gathering

With nothing being coursed, people are encouraged to sample many dishes at once. Food is typically shared and most always eaten with rice. Once again due largely to their Buddhist influence, they eagerly share food with other community members as well as give offerings to the monks daily.

### Celebration of Vegetables & Fresh Fruits

It would be almost unthinkable to eat a Thai meal with no vegetables. Raw, stir fried, pickled, or fermented are just a few of the many ways vegetables are celebrated in Thai cuisine. Usually raw vegetables are served alongside highly seasoned meats, salads, and dips creating a wonderful contrast. Along with the abundance of vegetables comes a comparably varied and complex array of fresh fruits. Typically eaten at the end of a meal, and often throughout the day, fresh tropical fruits are highly important and revered in Thai culture. Most are eaten out of hand but many are also used for drinks, sorbets, and incorporated into savory dishes as well.

### Smaller Bits of Meat

Thais prefer smaller bits of meat, usually grilled or stewed, and thanks to the Chinese often stir fried or deep fried. Chilies were brought by the Portuguese from South America and essentially replaced green peppercorn as a means of heat. Lack of refrigeration long ago led to the pickling, brining, and fermenting of a vast array of meats and vegetables in the name of preservation. Many of these techniques and ingredients remain essentially unchanged to this day.

The culture of Thailand has evolved greatly over time, from its relative isolation during the Sukhothai era, to its more contemporary Ayutthaya era, which absorbed influences from all over Asia. Indian, Chinese, Burmese, Khmer and other Southeast Asian influences are still evident in traditional Thai culture. Buddhism, Animism and Westernization also play a significant role in shaping modern culture.

Thai national culture is identified differently throughout regions in Thailand where it also integrated different regional cultures such as the Lanna, Dambro, Isan, Karen, as well Chinese origin, Malay origin, Indian origin, European origin (Portuguese origin), Persian origin, Arab origin, and in the reign of King Chulalongkorn in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the European trend of nationalism began to insert greater influence into Thai culture. However, the promotion of civic culture reached its peak after the Siamese revolution of 1932 where a series of authoritarian regimes began to insert greater control over people's culture and lifestyles, especially under the regime of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram.

Present day Thailand has a culture that is a combination of various local rituals from different parts of the country, along with Buddhist values and oriental trends like in many parts of Asia. The monarchy and royal institutions of Chakri dynasty remain highly revered according to original Siamese culture, whereas societal values in Thailand tend to be more collectivist and religiously secular than in other Southeast Asian cultures which have undergone influences from western colonization.

Thailand is nearly 94.6 percent Buddhist, 4.3% Muslim, and 1% Christian. Buddhist observance is mainly of the Theravada school (which includes the Thai Forest Tradition and the Dhammayuttika Nikaya and Santi Asoke sects) and an unknown minority belonging to the Mahayana school. In addition there are minorities of Muslims in Thailand (5-6 percent), Christians (1 percent), and other religions. Thai Theravada Buddhism is supported and overseen by the government, with monks receiving a number of government benefits, such as free use of public transportation.



Buddhism in Thailand is strongly influenced by traditional beliefs regarding ancestral and natural spirits that have been incorporated into Buddhist cosmology. Most Thai people install spirit houses (Thai: ศาลพระภูมิ; RTGS: san phra phum), miniature houses outside their dwellings, where they believe household spirits live. They present offerings of food and drink to these spirits to keep them happy. If these spirits aren't happy, it is believed that they will inhabit the household and cause chaos. These spirit houses can be found in public places and on the streets of Thailand, where the public make offerings.

Prior to the rise of Theravada Buddhism, both Indian Brahmanic religion and Mahayana Buddhism were present in Thailand. Influences from both these traditions can still be seen in present-day Thai folklore. Brahmanist shrines play an important role in Thai folk religion, and the Mahayana Buddhist influence is reflected in the presence of figures like Lokeshvara, a form of the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara sometimes incorporated into Thailand's iconography.

The traditional customs and the folklore of Thai people were gathered and described by Phya Anuman Rajadhon in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at a time when modernity changed the face of Thailand, and a great number of traditions disappeared or became adapted to modern life. Still, the striving towards refinement, rooted in ancient Siamese culture, consisting of promoting that which is refined and avoiding coarseness, is a major focus of the daily life of Thai people and high on their scale of values.[2]

One of the most distinctive Thai customs is the wai. Used in greetings, leave-taking, as an acknowledgement, or accompanying an apology, it comes in many forms, reflecting the relative status of those involved. Generally the salutation involves a prayer-like gesture with the hands, derived from the Añjali Mudrā of the Indian subcontinent, and it also may include a slight bow of the head. This salutation is often accompanied by a serene smile symbolizing a welcoming disposition and a pleasant attitude. Thailand is often referred to as the "land of smiles" in tourist brochures. Public displays of affection are not overly common in traditional Thai society, especially between lovers.[9] Such actions are becoming more common, especially among the younger generation.

A notable social norm holds that touching someone on the head may be considered rude. It is also considered rude to place one's feet at a level above someone else's head, especially if that person is of higher social standing. This is because the Thai people consider the foot to be the dirtiest and lowest part of the body, and the head the most respected and highest part of the body. This also influences how Thais sit when on the ground—their feet always pointing away from others, tucked to the side or behind them. Pointing at or touching something with your feet is also considered rude. It was reported in the Thai press that pedestrians were prohibited from climbing stairs to the Victory Monument BTS Station when a royal motorcade was due to pass on the road beneath because, according to Thai custom, feet cannot be at any point above the head of a royal family member.

Since a serene disposition is valued, conflict and sudden displays of anger are eschewed in Thai culture. For these reasons, visitors should take care not to create conflict or to display anger. Disagreements or disputes should be handled with a smile and no attempt should be made to assign blame to another. In everyday life in Thailand, there is a strong emphasis on the concept of sanuk, the idea that life should be fun. Because of this, Thais can be quite playful at work and during day-to-day activities. Displaying positive emotions in social interactions is also important in Thai culture.

Often, Thais will deal with disagreements, minor mistakes, or misfortunes by using the phrase mai pen rai (Thai: ไมเป็นไร) translated as "it doesn't matter". The ubiquitous use of this phrase in Thailand reflects a disposition towards minimizing conflict, disagreements or complaints. A smile and the sentence "mai pen rai" indicates that the incident is not important and therefore there is no conflict or shame involved.

Respect for hierarchy is a very important value for Thai people. The custom of bun khun emphasizes the indebtedness towards parents, as well as towards guardians, teachers, and caretakers. It describes the feelings and practices involved in certain relationships organized around generalized reciprocity, the slow-acting accounting of an exchange calculated according to locally interpreted scales and measures. It is also considered rude to step on any type of Thai currency (Thai coin or banknote), as they include a likeness of the King of Thailand.

A number of Thai customs relate to the special status of monks in Thai society. Thai monks are forbidden physical contact with women. Women are therefore expected to make way for passing monks to ensure that accidental contact does not occur. A variety of methods are employed to ensure that no incidental contact (or the appearance of such contact) between women and monks occurs. Women making offerings to monks place their donation at the feet of the



monk, or on a cloth laid on the ground or a table. Powders or unguents intended to carry a blessing are applied to Thai women by monks using the end of a candle or stick. Laypersons are expected to sit or stand with their heads at a lower level than that of a monk. Within a temple, monks may sit on a raised platform during ceremonies to make this easier to achieve.

When sitting in a temple, one is expected to point one’s feet away from images of the Buddha. Shrines inside Thai residences are arranged so as to ensure that the feet are not pointed towards the religious icons, such as placing the shrine on the same wall as the head of a bed, if a house is too small to remove the shrine from the bedroom entirely.

It is also customary to remove one’s footwear before entering a home or the sacred areas within a temple, and not to step on the threshold.

In the rural areas of northeast Thailand, there are a set of customs revolving around the lunar calendar. Known as heet sip song, each lunar month has a specific sheet (“tradition” or “ritual”) associated with it. These “merit-making” traditions are considered critical to an individual's life and afterlife, as well as important for community building. For example, during the first month of a lunar year, monks who have violated oaths perform penance. Lay people are expected to provide additional supplies to temples to support the monks through this time. Other traditions include celebrations of the harvest, eating of specific foods, and the popular Thai “water festival” in the fifth lunar month.



III. SUMMARY

The Hospital Industry in Thailand is segmented by Type (Chain Hotels and Independent Hotels), and Segment (Service Apartments, Budget and Economy Hotels, Mid- and Upper Midscale Hotels, and Luxury Hotels).

3.1 Market Overview

The tourism industry in Thailand is on the rise, and it occupied the ninth rank in the world’s most visited countries list, which has been driving the hospitality industry in the country. The key indicators of a hotel’s performance are on the rise and the tourist receipts and revenue generated from tourism as well.

The country recorded a 9.6% year on year growth rate in 2018, which accounted for THB 2 trillion. The East Asian market is the largest contributor with THB 810 billion and occupies 40% of the total share, where the Chinese alone contributed THB 581 billion. The European market contributed THB 500 billion and Russian constituted THB 120 billion of it. Domestic tourism is also on the rise in Thailand and made a 3.6% year on year growth rate. The citizens made around 164 million trips in 2018, which was largely encouraged by economic growth and expanded tourism in secondary cities in the country. According to the Airports Authority of Thailand, there was a 1.1% year on year increase in a number of domestic flights.

According to the data from the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, the key performance indicators showed growth rates in 2018 with a rise in Occupancy Rate (OR) to 71.4% from 70.6% in 2017. Bangkok, which is the travel and tourism hub of Thailand, recorded 81.2% OR which was 79.4% in 2017. The OR in Chon Buri rose to 79.4% which was at 77.6% in





2017. Phuket managed to score 0.5% growth rate after a ferry accident in July, which impacted on the arrivals from China. The Revenue per Available Room (RevPAR) also recorded 10.2% year on year growth rate.

**Rising International Visitors to Thailand are Driving the Market**

Thailand is the ninth country in the world’s most visited countries list. The number of international visitors to the country has been on the rise since the 2000s, and there were only two years (due to tsunami in 2004 and 2009 riots in Thailand and global recession) where there was a drop in total international arrivals. The number of visitors to Thailand almost doubled in 2019, when compared with the arrivals in 2011. China is the largest contributor to this number, followed by Malaysia and India.



Government’s Initiatives to Develop Other Regions as Tourist Hubs is Creating More Investment Opportunities In Thailand, the majority of hotel developments were concentrated in Bangkok as it is the travel and tourism hub of the country. The government has focused on developing other regions in the country to attract more visitors and to generate more revenues from their visits, and eventually developed and upgraded better transportation and connectivity facilities to regions, like Pattaya, Chiang Mai, Phuket, Koh Samui (Surat Thani), and Karbi. This resulted in a rise in hotel developments in those regions and registered doubled growth in room supply during 2015, when compared to 2000, according to Bank of Ayudhya, UNWTO. Several Home-grown hotel chains, independent hotels, and international hotel brands and their chains are a part of this expansion. The hospitality industry in Thailand is a combination of international hotel chain brands, domestic grown brands, and independent hotels. Accor SA is occupying a major share in terms of total room/keys supply with around 16,000 rooms, followed by Marriott International and InterContinental Hotel Groups, which together can meet the total number of rooms offered by Accor SA alone. The home-grown brand Centara Hotel Group offers a large supply of around 6,300 rooms, whereas Aspira Hospitality has the largest portfolio of 41 hotel properties in the country. [1]

**IV. CONCLUSION**

Thai culture and traditions incorporate a great deal of influence from India, China, Cambodia, and the rest of Southeast Asia. Thailand’s national religion, Theravada Buddhism, is central to modern Thai identity. Thai Buddhism has evolved over time to include many regional beliefs originating from Hinduism, animism, as well as ancestor worship. The official calendar in Thailand is based on the Eastern version of the Buddhist Era (BE). Thai identity today is a social construct of the Phibun regime in the 1940s.

Several ethnic groups mediated change between their traditional local culture, national Thai, and global cultural influences. Overseas Chinese also form a significant part of Thai society, particularly in and around Bangkok. Their successful integration into Thai society has allowed them to hold positions of economic and political power. Thai Chinese businesses prosper as part of the larger bamboo network.

Respect for elderly and superiors (by age, position, monks, or certain professions) is Thai mores. As with other Asian cultures, respect towards ancestors is an essential part of Thai spiritual practice. Thais have a strong sense of social hierarchy, reflecting in many classes of honorifics. Elders have by tradition ruled in family decisions or ceremonies.



Wai is a traditional Thai greeting, and is generally offered first by a person who is younger or lower in social status and position. Older siblings have duties to younger ones. Thais have a strong sense of hospitality and generosity.

Taboos in Thai culture include touching someone's head or pointing with the feet, as the head is considered the most sacred and the foot the lowest part of the body. Architecture is the preeminent medium of the country's cultural legacy and reflects both the challenges of living in Thailand's sometimes extreme climate as well as, historically, the importance of architecture to the Thai people's sense of community and religious beliefs. Influenced by the architectural traditions of many of Thailand's neighbors, it has also developed significant regional variation within its vernacular and religious buildings.

The Ayutthaya Kingdom movement, which went from approximately 1350 to 1767, was one of the most fruitful and creative periods in Thai architecture. The identity of architecture in the Ayutthaya period is designed to display might and riches so it has great size and appearance. The temples in Ayutthaya seldom built eaves stretching from the masthead. The dominant feature of this style is sunlight shining into buildings. During the latter part of the Ayutthaya period, architecture was regarded as a peak achievement that responded to the requirements of people and expressed the gracefulness of Thainess.

Buddhist temples in Thailand are known as "wat", from the Pāli vāṭa, meaning an enclosure. A temple has an enclosing wall that divides it from the secular world. Wat architecture has seen many changes in Thailand in the course of history. Although there are many differences in layout and style, they all adhere to the same principles.

Aside from folk and regional dances (southern Thailand's Menora (dance) and Ramwong, for example), the two major forms of Thai classical dance drama are Khon and Lakhon nai. In the beginning, both were exclusively court entertainments and it was not until much later that a popular style of dance theater, likay, evolved as a diversion for common folk who had no access to royal performances.

Folk dance forms include dance theater forms like likay, numerous regional dances (ram), the ritual dance ram muay, and homage to the teacher, wai khru. Both ram muay and wai khru take place before all traditional muay Thai matches. The wai is also an annual ceremony performed by Thai classical dance groups to honor their artistic ancestors.

Thai classical music is synonymous with those stylized court ensembles and repertoires that emerged in their present form within the royal centers of Central Thailand some 800 years ago. These ensembles, while being influenced by older practices, are today uniquely Thai expressions. While the three primary classical ensembles, the Piphat, Khrueng sai and Mahori differ in significant ways, they all share a basic instrumentation and theoretical approach. Each employs small ching hand cymbals and krap wooden sticks to mark the primary beat reference. Thai classical music has had a wide influence on the musical traditions of neighboring countries. The traditional music of Myanmar was strongly influenced by the Thai music repertoire, called Yodaya, which was brought over from the Ayutthaya Kingdom. As Siam expanded its political and cultural influence to Laos and Cambodia during the early Rattanakosin period, its music was quickly absorbed by the Cambodia and Lao courts.

Thai cuisine is one of the most popular in the world. Thai food blends five fundamental tastes: sweet, spicy, sour, bitter, and salty. The herbs and spices most used in Thai cooking themselves have medicinal qualities such as garlic, lemongrass, kaffir lime, galangal, turmeric, coriander, coconut milk. Each region of Thailand has its specialties: kaeng khiao wan (green curry) in the central region, som tam (green papaya salad) in the northeast, khao soi in the north, and massaman curry in the south.

In 2017, seven Thai dishes appeared on a list of the "World's 50 Best Foods"— an online worldwide poll by CNN Travel. Thailand had more dishes on the list than any other country. They were: tom yam goong (4<sup>th</sup>), pad Thai (5<sup>th</sup>), som tam (6<sup>th</sup>), massaman curry (10<sup>th</sup>), green curry (19<sup>th</sup>), Thai fried rice (24<sup>th</sup>) and mu nam tok (36<sup>th</sup>). Two desserts were also listed in CNN's 50 Best Desserts Around The World: mango sticky rice and tub tim krob.

The staple food in Thailand is rice, particularly jasmine rice (also known as hom Mali) which forms part of almost every meal. Thailand is a leading exporter of rice, and Thais consume over 100 kg of milled rice per person per year. Thailand is also the world leader in the edible insect industry and well-known for its street food; Bangkok is sometimes called the street food capital of the world.



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