

# The Ultimate Guide to Teaching English in Thailand



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## Forward

Calling this the "Ultimate Guide to Teaching English in Thailand" is leaving me wide open for criticism, but if I don't get criticism I'll never have the hands-down, undisputed, and ultimate teaching book for foreigners coming to Thailand to teach.

Seriously - I welcome all input, good and bad, because I really do want to make it the best book available on this important subject.

Probably you have already decided on the "why" of teaching in Thailand or you wouldn't have bought this book. I chose Thailand for many reasons, not least of which being the relative stability of the country in terms of favorable cost of living, safety, and opportunities for fun and exploration.

Though Thailand's political landscape is in non-stop flux, cycling over and over between those in power and those who wish to be, the expatriates living here have a relatively stable experience. Over the past five years living in Thailand I've yet to fear for my life. I've yet to have any serious issues with arranging visas, work-permits, and the like. Now that I have a small family, I feel right at home in Thailand and don't anticipate moving anytime soon.

I was a teacher for a couple of years in Thailand. I have a master's degree in counseling psychology from the USA and I've worked with children with sexual and physical abuse in the past. I have also been a soccer coach for 7 - 9 year olds on a couple different occasions over the years. I have had some good experiences teaching kids in the USA in these limited capacities. I've not taught a classroom full of children (30 or so) before coming to Thailand and jumping into it.

If you don't have experience and you're worried about that, you should know, so too is everyone else. Coming to Thailand to teach presents you with many unknowns. The only way you're going to start feeling comfortable is to get some months teaching under your belt.

Succeeding as a teacher of English in Thailand is not easy. You have to love kids. You

have to be open to the new experiences that will present themselves to you, or sometimes, as it seems - smack you in the face. You have to be willing to give more than you thought you would - because Thai kids need to be taught a certain way. The way Thais learn has been the same for many years, and you won't change it by teaching Tasmanian style, Fijian style, or enforcing your own military code of conduct - though I gave it my best effort on this last one.

Thailand is an absolutely unique place. Thais are a unique group of people. They are lovely people, and you'll probably have a great time of teaching if you're ready to give it your all and face the new experiences with open arms.

There is *nothing but* new experience here in comparison to what you knew in America, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, or wherever you hail from. Be careful not to think this is your home country and that you should teach Thai students the way you were taught.

My experiences and those of the teachers I knew and worked with over the years form the factual background for this guide. As a preparation I did a meta review of the books available on teaching in Thailand as well as reviewing many of the teaching resources available online. Sources I used online in compiling this guide are mentioned in the Resources section at the end of this book.

This guide is meant to provide the "big picture" about teaching in Thailand. Many expats teaching here - love it, and remain in Thailand years on end. Others, after a term or two before throwing in the towel and calling it quits. I hope, in giving you as much information about the reality of teaching in Thailand as I can, it helps you make a decision *before* you arrive.

If there is anything in this ebook you find to be incorrect - in fact, I ask that you write me so I can straighten it out. Some of my goals for this guide include keeping it as factual as possible, along with keeping the content current and relevant to all expats considering moving to Thailand to teach.



## TEFL

What is it? Do you need a TEFL, TESOL, CERTA, or ESL certificate?

A Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) certificate is not always needed to work in Thailand, but if you're headed to other countries you're better off to get one as it will give you more options.

There is also TESOL which is Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, which is acceptable in Thailand and other countries as well.

Many companies offer these certifications. Is one any better than any other? I wouldn't hazard a guess. I know many people who have a bachelor's degree (in anything - literally), and they didn't need the TEFL or TESOL certificate.

Will 120 hours of training help you teach in Thailand? I think it must.

Is it a good idea to pay for the course? Up to you. I think in-class experience, reading books, and finding information online is better than any course. But, I haven't sat through them - so, as I said, up to you.

TEFL international is an international organization that oversees the issuing of globally accepted TEFL certificates.

Taking the TEFL inside the country you're planning on teaching in is probably the better way to go if you're going to get the certificate. TEFL courses in America, UK, and wherever you go can't possibly prepare you for every country's culture. Thailand is a very unique culture and I'd recommend doing the course here in Thailand if at all possible.

Try TEFLThailand.com for course locations within Thailand. Their certificates are good in Japan, Korea, and China as well as other countries.

**More Clarification:**

**TESOL** - common in the USA. Teaching English in non-English speaking countries.

**TEFL** - common in the UK. Teaching English in non-English speaking countries.

**ESL** - English as Second language. Teaching English to students in countries using English as a 2nd, 3rd or less language.

**CELTA** - Certificate for English language teaching to adults is a TESOL certificate course that has been around for a very long time and many people recognize the name.

## More on Teaching in Thailand

In the past you could teach without a bachelor's degree. Today it's still possible, but the number of schools that will take an applicant without a bachelor's degree from their home country is smaller. There are a number of Thai English schools that need English teachers at any rate, and teachers without degrees can still get legal employment at some of the language schools - with work permit.

A bachelor's degree is not required by the Ministry of Labor. A school can vouch for the foreign teacher applicant so a work permit can be issued. For any government schools or schools with a good reputation, finding work without a bachelor's degree will be more difficult. Your best chance is to look in the small towns because they often have difficulty attracting foreign teachers who want nightlife, beaches, and shopping.

### Fake Documents

In the past it's been rather easy to pick up a fake degree or RSA certificate on Khao San Road in Bangkok and get a work permit to teach. Many foreigners have done so.

What is the risk? Unless you make someone angry that knows you bought your degree somewhere, the risk is small. Within Bangkok there were a number of checks of foreign teachers' documents at schools, but outside of Bangkok nobody is reporting this happening that I'm aware of.

The risk, if caught is that you'll spend some time in a Thai jail, have a court case, be found guilty, fined, and deported - blacklisted from ever setting foot back in this lovely country.

*Is it worth it? Some still think so.*

I've always kept my passport in my possession. In fact, it's the US law that I must. However, with the work permit some people recommend not letting the school keep it. I let the school keep mine so I'm not worried about losing it. If they lose it - it's their responsibility. It's one more thing to keep track of and I just don't want to worry about it. Up to you how you choose to handle it.

To get the work permit issued you'll need to get a non-immigrant b visa issued. Your school will (should) help you immensely with this project because it would be quite a chore to do it on your own.

## **VISA Requirements - Here's What You Need:**

1. You'll need a non-immigrant b visa. If you don't have one you'll need to go to a Thai embassy or consulate in a neighboring country. Malaysia, Cambodia, and Laos, are the usual destinations.
2. Bring a copy of a letter from your school stating that you have been offered a teaching job.
3. Your Thai school will have a number of things they must give you copies of to submit with your application.
4. You'll need passport type photos for almost all paperwork you do in Thailand so always have 10-20 of those on hand. You'll need some for this application too.

5. There is a fee which either you are paying out of pocket, or your school will reimburse you for. Find out which before you go. Most schools will reimburse you later for it.

Often the embassy or consulate, though you're carrying every single paper you could possibly get from your school, will request some other paper you don't have. It's a game that many expats have been put through over the years. Each place you go to get the non-immigrant b visa has different requirements, so it seems. Ensure the school calls the exact embassy or consulate where you'll go and gets a complete list of what you'll need or you might face some runaround. If you don't do this your overnight trip might turn into a three day trip.

Be aware that Thai embassies and consulates in other countries take Thai holidays - and plan accordingly! There are many Thai holidays that just seem to pop up unexpectedly.

Tip: Go early, before 10 am. Some places can get you the visa that same afternoon. Other times an overnight is mandatory. Try your luck by arriving early, you might be pleasantly surprised.

I said, *might!*

Tip: Never submit your original degrees or RSA certificates. They might be lost. Make copies of everything - and sign them. Signed copies serve as originals.

In order to get your work permit issued you will probably have to get a medical certificate from a Thai hospital. This may or may not be required, and it's nothing to fear. You'll go to the reception area of a public or private hospital, or maybe a private clinic where a doctor may, or may not, examine you. You'll pay a small fee - less than 1,000 THB, and get a certificate of health. In the past I've paid something like 90 THB each for these at a private hospital.

**Tip:** Things change in Thailand often regarding the procedures for obtaining the various visas, work permits, and other paperwork. It's always in flux. The information

in this book is up-to-date as of today. Tomorrow it might change a little bit. The school you teach with can find out the current procedure more easily than you can find it on the internet forums.

Another thing to remember is that while rules regarding procedures for visa and work permit should be standardized and enforced uniformly at the various embassies, work permit offices and such. They routinely are not. Some say it's like rolling the dice!

There are "visa agents" that offer to run your passport across the border for you and get the necessary visa. I would advise strongly against letting anyone run your passport anywhere but to a copier. Do the legwork and keep your passport in your possession at all times. Who knows what they're doing with your identity? You might try to return to your home country and be thrown in jail as an imposter - of yourself!

Foreigners overstaying their visa are charged the rate of 500 THB per day of overstay. There is a maximum fine of 20,000 THB for this offense. Some expats overstay two years. Some six. If you overstay more than about six months you may have a mandatory court date where you're assessed a fine of nearly any amount, but probably won't exceed 100,000 THB. At times the foreigner is let off during court and need not pay more than 1,000 THB for an overstay.

If you're lucky enough to make it to the airport and go through immigration there you might just pay the 20,000 THB and be on your way home, free to return to Thailand in a week, or tomorrow. Frequent overstayers are sometimes penalized with a blacklisting from setting foot back in the country, but it's not often, as I understand it.

### **Changing Schools, Changing Work Permits**

When you leave one school and move to another your work permit must be cancelled and you need to re-apply at the new school. I've heard contradicting information about whether you need to reapply for your teaching license if you change schools. Some say yes, some no.

### **Summary**

Becoming a legal teacher in Thailand as a foreigner is a frustrating process. If your school won't help you and walk you through the entire process then you should probably go find a different school. For a foreigner to navigate the process on their own - it would be a nightmare.

# Types of Teaching Placements

**What are the different types of schools where English teachers work and how is each of the different types of English teaching jobs different?**

## Types

### Private Language Schools

- ✓ 2nd in numbers of jobs available
- ✓ highest concentration in Bangkok
- ✓ in all major cities
- ✓ air conditioned and nicest rooms and facilities
- ✓ major names: ECC, Siam Computer, AUA, Inlingua
- ✓ open year round, seven days per week except holidays
  - weekend classes are most full and teachers most needed
- ✓ weekday classes are afternoon and evenings
- ✓ weekend classes are morning to evening
- ✓ contracts specify a maximum number of teaching hours per week (20-25 is average)
  - pays well and don't require office hours like government schools and universities
- ✓ with year contract you can receive a couple weeks of paid holidays
- ✓ student ages run the gamut - young to adult
- ✓ classes last 2-3 hours each with a break in the middle
- ✓ smaller classes than government schools or universities (10-20 students on average)
- ✓ no grading requirements usually
- ✓ no unpaid English camps
- ✓ no office hours
- ✓ salary 25 - 35,000 THB per month for 20-25 hours teaching per week

## Thai Government Schools

- ✓ probably best overall position for most foreigners
- ✓ highest number of open positions across the country. Thousands of schools employ teachers.
- ✓ large class sizes (20 - 50+)
- ✓ no weekend classes
- ✓ extra duties - a play; a Saturday excursion with the kids; an English camp once or twice per year
- ✓ 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. standard hours
- ✓ short classes 45 minutes to 1 hour
- ✓ usually have air conditioning - not always though
- ✓ many tests, grading is necessary
- ✓ everyone passes regardless of grades you give
- ✓ can repeat same lesson with all same age classes, cuts down on preparation time
- ✓ paperwork is off the scale - huge amounts of paperwork, and pink book grading nightmare
- ✓ frequent changes in schedule, holidays, practices for sports day and everything else will leave you frazzled. Thai teachers go with the flow - foreigners have issues with constant change and last minute notice.
- ✓ usually free or reduced rate breakfast and/or lunch
- ✓ most schools have some sort of WIFI internet in the teachers room or at least connected desktop computers
- ✓ 3 months paid breaks per year, some of which you'll spend in office -but probably 8 weeks outside
- ✓ many Thai holidays you're paid for
- ✓ about 36 weeks of teaching all year

## **Universities**

- ✓ lower pay (25,000 THB on average)
- ✓ fewer hours to teach (10-15)
- ✓ mandatory office hours
- ✓ higher prestige for teachers at good universities
- ✓ better identification with students - feel like they're friends
- ✓ good opportunity for teaching private lessons in evenings and weekends
- ✓ must have bachelors degree, if good school - master's or more
- ✓ little value placed on CELTA, TEFL, TESOL, etc.
- ✓ most good universities in Bangkok and Chiang Mai

## **International Schools**

- ✓ highest pay
- ✓ fewer hours to teach (10-15)
- ✓ mandatory office hours
- ✓ some prestige associated with these positions
- ✓ teaching mostly foreign students and children of rich Thais
- ✓ much paperwork
- ✓ good opportunity for teaching private lessons in evenings and weekends
- ✓ must have bachelors degree, teaching certification - if good school master's or higher
- ✓ most good schools are in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, there are a few scattered International schools in areas with a high concentration of expats

# Teaching English, Yes. But, What Classes? Computers, Math, Grammar?

As you sit there, probably in your home country and picture teaching English in Thailand you may just be contemplating teaching the whole ball of wax to Thais: grammar, conversation, reading, writing, etc. There are actually many different English classes you can teach in Thailand.

Instead, the reality is you will specialize in some area. You might teach just conversational English. The entire class will be spent talking back and forth, reviewing various situations they might encounter in public where they need to speak English.

You might choose to teach just English grammar rules. You might teach a class for Thais preparing to take the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or the IELTS so they can attend a university in the UK or USA.

Or, you might not really be focused on teaching English at all, but teaching in English such subjects as math, advanced math, computers, physical education, science, or something else. The English programs for government schools have all of these courses and even a drama class in English.

Though it sounds like the ultimate, teaching physical education in Thailand and getting paid as much as everyone else stuck teaching English in a classroom, it might not be your cup of tea as the temperatures climb past 37 degrees and there are few places to hide from the sun. If one of your kids goes unconscious (or worse) from heat exhaustion, then you're really in the hot seat!

Makes teaching English a whole lot more exciting I think - yes? I chose to teach math and it was pretty boring to me, but not nearly as boring as teaching English grammar would have been.

If you end up teaching at a language school you might teach advanced English, English for special purposes, TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC, GMAT, GRE, IT or business English.

## Hours

The number of hours you work actually teaching and physically being there in the office are two things to carefully consider.

The average number of hours expected teaching time with students per week is somewhere about 18 per week in a government high school English program. This is probably the average everywhere, though some universities give their teachers just 10-15 hours per week!

Though you're only teaching some small number of hours per week you are probably expected to be in the office for 8-9 hours per day five days per week. If you're making the average 30,000 THB per month, it works out to an inglorious \$5-6 dollars per hour. If you add all the time you'll be preparing lessons at home, grading at home, and filling out the pink book grading reports at home it might be more like \$4-5 per hour.

But then, in the case of the government school positions you've got to factor in the 2-3 months paid vacation.

With that figured in the average government school teacher making 30,000 THB per month and in the office for 40 hours per week and doing 10 hours of work at home in preparation for classes is making, in American dollars: \$6.25 per hour.

All in all - this is probably the best situation you'll find as a teacher, and, supplementing your income by teaching another 10 hours per week in your off-time at 300 baht per hour (absolute minimum for 1 student per hour) will give you another \$400 USD per month to spend.

There are people in the USA and maybe your country that are working for less and have three times the cost of living.

Teaching in Thailand is still a great way to go!

**Tip:** You can try negotiating for fewer hours in the office if at all possible. It makes a lot of sense!

### **Tax withholding**

To be honest I've had the tax withholdings explained to me multiple times at numerous schools. It's always different and I gave up caring anymore. You will be better off to just take it for granted that the school you work for will take out tax and medical insurance. They tally it up somewhere and all the other teachers at the school are getting hit with it too so don't let it get to you. Just ignore it.

Tax rates are usually something like 900 THB on 32,000 THB salary per month. Health insurance also comes out of your check and will be a few hundred per month in addition to the taxes.

Know this - the school you're working for should be withholding tax from your pay. If they're not, you may get hit with it later. Better to push them into doing it above board so you can rest easy later and not have 10,000 THB deducted from your salary at the end of the year. Have them write something up in the contract to look official, if it's not there already.

### **Security withholding**

Rarely will it happen anymore, but occasionally schools will try to hold some of your pay back from you. They do this for Thais with various types of employment too. My wife had money held back at Kumon Learning center, and a hotel she worked at. They pay it back at the end, but, it's something to be aware of.

As a foreigner you shouldn't stand for it. Just tell them, "no". There's not much they can do with "no" and usually Thais, when faced with it, give in - much preferring not to argue about it.

## End of Contract bonuses

Most government schools and other decent schools will offer you a bonus after one year of teaching that is equal to one-month of pay. Whether you look at this as your own money being withheld every month without your consent, or some other way - if you plan to stay the entire year just bite the bullet and play the game. It's nice to have 30,000+ THB at the end of the year if you wouldn't have saved it on your own. At least you'll have a means to buy a plane ticket back home if you're through with teaching after just one year!

### **Thai Teaching Salaries**

Just to let you know, Thai teachers with a bachelors degree start at 7,000 – 7,500 THB at a government school. If they retire at the school they might get 80% of what they were earning before they retired. Thais making 25-30K THB are doing really well for themselves and will usually have a house and a modest vehicle. An interesting fact is that, upon retirement, they can choose- monthly payments for the rest of their lives or a large lump sum payment and a reduced amount per month. Most choose the lump sum as you can imagine.

## What is Teaching a Thai Class Actually Like?

I've taught students that were seven years old and straight up through thirty-five years. I had an easier and more enjoyable time of teaching the younger students, believe it or not. At the early ages I found students easier to deal with. It's possible I expected their bad behavior when it happened. With the older teens I was probably expecting better behavior, and so it wasn't a great experience for me. Teaching adults was also a good experience - they were easier to relate to because they were closer to my age.

Some teachers thrive on teaching teens and wouldn't think of teaching grade school students. To each her own.

Though there are differences in behavior between age groups, there is an underlying assumption that every Thai student, regardless of age, have about learning English.

It's *sanuk*. It's fun.

I didn't understand this concept, coming from America where I'd label very few of my classes *fun*. Actually, maybe only gym class could have been called fun.

It's better if you understand this now - rather than later. This insist on having fun. If you're not having fun in your classes then you probably wont' be asked to return for the next school year. If you're teaching private classes that aren't any fun then you'll lose students and not have any repeat students. Constantly trying to find a supply of students is tiring. Better to improve your classes!

If you're not having fun while you're teaching, the kids are not having fun learning. The entire school system is built around the concept of having fun while learning.

# Your Co-Workers

## Your Foreign (Farang) Co-Workers

Farang is a word that means foreigner. Don't get upset by it because it does you no good. Get used to it and don't look at it as a negative term. 99% of Thais don't use it in a negative fashion - and ignore any that do... 99% don't mean any harm when they say the word...

Foreign teachers in Thailand come in all flavors. If you're looking for camaraderie - a group of friends at the school you're teaching at that you can have a blast with in Thailand - you might have a difficult time of that, or you might luck into the right group at the right time.

There are a wide range of personality types that work as teachers in Thailand. We have the sex-tourist that can't get enough and teaches because it's the only way to continue to pay for their escapades. Others work on bedding their university and other adult students.

There are people with heart - the Peace Corps type, or volunteer types that are here for the genuine experience of being immersed in a new culture and want to do everything the Thai way.

There are student volunteers that convince their parents this would be a great way to earn credit for their university degree who aren't really very interested in experiencing Thai culture, just Thai nightlife.

There are the rejects from farangland that are at odds with aspects of their home country and escape to Thailand in search of greener pasture, less stress, easier living. Sometimes these people fit right in, and sometimes they are liabilities here too.

There are professional teachers that love teaching and come to Thailand qualified to teach, ready to teach, and are superstar teachers in Thailand. They make nice money

and usually stay for a long-time because they're making as much money in Thailand as they were making in their home country and with a fraction of expenses.

There are the retired folks that realized they did nothing fun in their lives so they come to Thailand, teach, and don't end up doing anything fun here - just griping about every situation and how it's different from their own home country.

There are the alcoholics and drug addicted that come because the cost of living is cheaper. Beer and rum is cheaper. It's a lot more fun to be an alcoholic in Thailand than it is in other countries apparently.

## **Thai Teachers You Work With...**

Thai teaching assistants are a mixed blessing... when you first start teaching they are probably a good resource to have. They can run interference for you until you get caught up understanding the Thai English accent and eventually understand some Thai on your own.

Sometimes the assistants have taught the course you're teaching for the first time, for years before you. They can teach circles around you, but, they are assisting you because their English is poor and they want to have the time working directly with you.

There are Thai assistants that are outright jealous of foreign teachers' high pay. Why? Well, the Thai assistants usually only make 5,000 to 7,500 THB per month outside of Bangkok. It's probably the same in Bangkok. These are university graduates, that are looking to gain experience in a classroom and either aren't ready to take a full-time English teaching position themselves, or no such position exists at the school and they take the assistant job to get some experience working directly with a native English speaker (you).

OK - that's the full sample! What do you think?

## **The Ultimate Guide to Teaching English in Thailand has:**

- **104 pages** packed with the most complete information on teaching English in Thailand.
- **Compatibility with iPhone**, iPod Touch, Blackberry, Palm, PC, MAC, and anything that you can read a PDF file with. It works with my Nokia 5800 Xpress Music phone. It will work with many other Nokia phones as well.
- **These payment options: credit card, echeck, or Paypal.**
- **Immediate download** - you will receive a secure download link after payment.

This guide is the product of a meta-review of all the Thailand teaching books, ebooks, and articles available at the present time. You simple cannot get a better book on **Teaching English in Thailand** than this one... it is the **ULTIMATE**.

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**Cheers!**

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