



Siam Legal Details Immigration Mistakes to Avoid When Arriving for the First Time in Thailand

October 05, 2026

Bangkok, Thailand - October 05, 2026 -

Siam Legal International, a Thailand-based law firm, has published a step-by-step arrival checklist for first-time visitors to Thailand, covering the entry process from passport condition and pre-arrival paperwork to the documents immigration officers may request at the counter. The guide reflects entry procedures as of October 2026 and sets out each stage in the order travelers generally encounter it.

Most travelers clear Thai immigration within minutes, and the guide notes that the issues which do cause delays or refusals are largely avoidable with preparation. Because entry rules and procedures can change, and some requirements vary by nationality, airport, and itinerary, travelers are encouraged to confirm current requirements with the Thai Immigration Bureau or a Royal Thai Embassy or Consulate before departure.

Preparation starts with the physical passport. Officers and automated gates scan the barcode on the biodata page, and torn pages, water damage, heavy wear, or unofficial souvenir stamps can result in a passport being refused. Six months of remaining passport validity is required for Thai visa applications and is widely recommended for visa-exempt travel, as some airlines may refuse boarding to passengers with less, and entry remains at the discretion of the immigration officer.

Under requirements set by the Thai Immigration Bureau, foreign nationals entering by air, land, or sea must submit the Thailand Digital Arrival Card, known as the TDAC, within the three days before arrival. The form is free through the official Immigration Bureau portal, and passengers transiting without passing through immigration control are exempt. Travelers who arrive without a completed card may be directed out of the queue to complete it before being processed.

The permitted stay granted on arrival depends on nationality and on any bilateral agreement in place, so the guide recommends confirming a country's visa exemption category before booking. Travelers are advised to check the date stamped in the passport before leaving the counter. According to Royal Thai Embassy guidance, overstays are fined THB 500 per day up to a maximum of THB 20,000, and longer overstays can lead to deportation and re-entry bans whose length depends on the duration of the overstay.

Visitors who need more time can generally apply for an extension at a local immigration office, where the Immigration Bureau fee is THB 1,900. Approval remains at the discretion of the immigration officer, and offices are closed on weekends and public holidays, so applications are best made well before the permitted stay expires.

Connecting passengers face different procedures depending on how the journey is booked. Travelers on a single ticket with checked baggage tagged through to the final destination typically proceed via the transfer area, while those on separate tickets will in many cases need to clear immigration, collect checked baggage, and check in again landside. Exact arrangements depend on the airlines involved and any baggage agreements between them, so travelers should confirm with their carrier before flying. Suvarnabhumi and Don Mueang are separate airports, and travel between them commonly takes around an hour, depending on traffic.

Inside the immigration hall, arrivals are typically directed into lanes based on travel status and should keep a passport and boarding pass in hand. At the desk, hats and sunglasses should be removed for fingerprinting and a photograph. Filming in the immigration zone is prohibited, and electronic cigarettes are illegal throughout Thailand.

Immigration officers, who belong to the Royal Thai Police, have discretion to conduct spot checks, and the documents requested can vary from one traveler to another. Supporting documents may include proof of return or onward travel dated within the permitted stay, a booking for the first night of accommodation, and proof of funds. Travel insurance is recommended for most visitors.

"Most arrivals clear the counter in a matter of minutes, but officers look at the overall travel pattern as well as the paperwork," said Rex Baay, Senior Immigration Consultant and Operations Manager at Siam Legal

International. "A history of frequent back-to-back tourist entries can prompt additional questions, and because the visa exemption is strictly for tourism, any reference to work, freelancing, or client projects at the desk can create problems that are difficult to undo."

The full walkthrough is available in Siam Legal's Thailand arrival guide, which covers passport checks, the TDAC, transit between airports, and the conduct expected at the immigration counter. Information in the guide and this release is current as of October 5, 2026.

Siam Legal International is a Thailand-based law firm with more than 22 years of experience serving Thai and international clients in immigration, corporate and commercial law, property, and litigation. The firm maintains offices in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Pattaya.

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