

## THAILAND

In Thailand there are 114 distinct people groups. Following are two of the groups.

### Thai, Central



The Central Tai, or Siamese, live on the country's rich central plain. The area, which includes the capital city of Bangkok, is watered by the Chao Phraya River. The Central Tai, who represent more than a third of the population, call themselves the Khon Thai, meaning "the free people".

Centuries ago the Tai lived north of Yangtzekiang in China. Relentless pressure by the Chinese gradually forced them southward. They conquered many peoples and cultures as they sought a new homeland, but by the 10th century they had settled in Central Thailand. A bloodless revolution in 1932, led by Westernized intellectuals, instituted a democratic constitutional monarchy. However, the country has suffered numerous governmental upheavals since then. Today, Buddhism is the central and unifying force in Tai society and even maintains social control. The Central Tai speak Thai, the official language of the country.

What are their lives like?

The Central Tai are unusually polite, respectful, and hospitable people. Their children are brought up to respect those of a higher rank, with additional emphasis on independence and self-reliance. The Central Tai seldom use physical punishment to discipline children.

Age is highly respected in Central Tai society. Type of occupation, wealth, and place and type of residence follow age in terms of respect and rank. Rural farmers rank below artisans, merchants, and city government officials; clergy form a separate group. Families are the core of Tai society. In rural areas, the immediate family

usually lives, eats, and farms together. A young married couple may live with the bride's family until they can establish their own home.

The Central Tai are distinguished by a near absence of labor division by gender. Both men and women plow, till, fish, cook, tend babies, clean house, and wash clothes. Rice is the major economic crop, providing both a food staple and a cash crop.

The wealthiest Tai live in wood-framed homes that are raised off the ground and have plank floors, hard wood or mahogany panels, and tile roofs. The poorest villagers live in bamboo homes with thatched roofs and dirt floors. There are a wide variety of homes in the cities: multi-level cement houses, houses that are attached to or above shops, townhouses, apartment complexes, or wooden houses. The temple and school are prominent features in the villages. Water taxis transport people and cargo on polluted waterways that connect houses and other buildings.

What are their beliefs?

Theravada Buddhism was introduced in Thailand in 329 B.C. Almost all of the Tai are devout followers of Buddha ("the enlightened one") and seek to eliminate suffering and improve their future by gaining merit in pursuit of perfect peace, or nirvana. They believe that merit can be acquired through feeding monks, donating to temples, and attending worship services.

Traditionally, young men enter a Buddhist monastery for three months to study Buddhism. The Tai also attempt to incorporate their Buddhist beliefs with folk animism, a practice in which they seek help through the worship of spirits and objects.

What are their needs?

Thailand has serious public health problems. Hepatitis is prevalent and malaria is a problem in rural areas. HIV infections are epidemic in the cities.

Prostitution is a pressing social problem. Approximately 200,000 to 500,000 prostitutes, usually from poor, rural areas, are forced to sell their bodies to help their families survive. Education and employment opportunities for women are limited, and many women and children lack adequate health care.

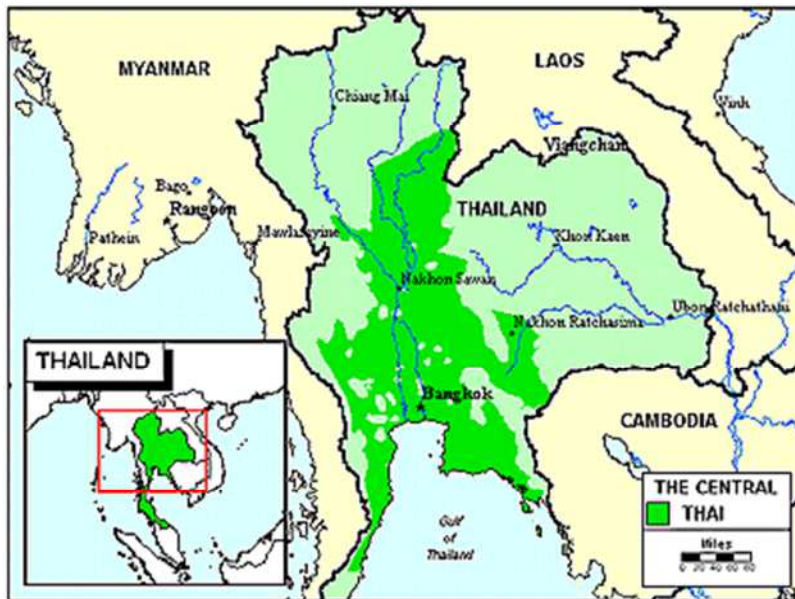
Although a number of missions agencies are working among the Central Tai, more help is needed. The Bible, the Jesus film, and audio recordings are all available in the Tai language. However, only a handful of the Central Tai are Christians.

Prayer Points

- \* Ask God to raise prayer teams who will begin breaking up the soil through worship and intercession.

- \* Pray that God will grant wisdom and favor to the missions agencies that are currently ministering to the Central Tai.

- \* Ask God to send Christian teachers and medical teams to work among the Central Tai.
- \* Pray that God will reveal Himself to these precious people through dreams and visions.
- \* Ask the Holy Spirit to soften the hearts of the Central Tai towards Christians so that they will be receptive to the Gospel.
- \* Ask the Lord to raise up strong local churches among the Central Tai.



Location within Country: Central Thailand, centered in Bangkok.

Population in this Country: 19,758,000

Primary Language: Thai (19,758,000 Speakers)

Primary Religion: Buddhism

Religion Sub-division: Theravada

% Christian Adherents: Data not available

% Evangelical: Data not available

Persecution index: unstated

### **Khmer, Northern**

The Northern Khmer are mostly found in the lower northeast of Thailand, in the provinces of Buriram, Surin and Sisaket, which border Cambodia. They are also known as Thai-Khmer or Khmer-Surin. Northern Khmer speakers are also found in

villages along the Thai-Cambodian border in the Prachinburi province. They number approximately 1.25 million people in Thailand with possibly 3,000 - 5,000 Christians among them. The dialect of Khmer spoken in Cambodia across the north is very similar to the dialect in Thailand, though in Thailand many Thai words are also used.

The Khmer have been in the lower northeast of present-day Thailand even longer than the Thai. There are many Khmer ruins dating from the pre-Angkor and the Angkor period in the three provinces and beyond, notably at Phanomrung (Buriram), still with concentrations of Khmer-speaking communities nearby. A linguistic survey carried out in the 1960s discovered that Buriram province was approximately 75% Khmer-speaking, Surin 90% and Sisaket 70%. These figures may have changed since then, but the broad coverage of the language can still be found in each of the provinces. In Thailand, many Khmer are migrant laborers, especially in the dry season, and can be found on construction sites in Bangkok and in fruit and sugarcane plantations in other parts of the country. Many of the young people from the region are now working in factories in and around Greater Bangkok.

What are their lives like?

The Northern Khmer are traditionally rice farmers, following the rhythm of the monsoon which can be notoriously fickle, with one village able to plant crops while another suffers drought. They are also skilled timber-cutters and house builders, and many Khmer women weave silk and cotton cloth during the dry season. Due to lack of ground water, only small-scale agriculture is possible, apart from raising cattle or buffaloes. Their food is distinctively Khmer with the popular somlor (soup) and liberal use of prohok.

Music is also very much part of their culture with the Khmer violin and plengkantrum (Khmer folksong) at the centre of village life and celebrations. They dress much like the Thai, but with distinctive colors and patterns in their sarongs.

What are their beliefs?

Outwardly they are followers of the Thai national religion of Theravada Buddhism, with a strong admixture of spirit-worship and divination which is performed by the kruu, who may be either a monk or a layman. The Khmer are known (and sometimes feared) within Thailand for their powers of witchcraft and sorcery. As well as Buddhist festivals, they also hold a festival to the spirits of the dead known as Prachum Ben. Most Khmer houses have a spiritshelf near the house, and another inside the house with items placed there by the khruu.

What are their needs?

In Thailand, the Northern Khmer come at the bottom of educational success, and alcoholism among both men and women is a major problem in many families. Their greatest need is to hear the Gospel presented in a way they can understand.



Location within Country: Northeast, mainly Surin, Sisaket, Buriram, Khorat provinces.

Population in this Country: 1,158,000

People Cluster: Mon-Khmer

Primary Language: Khmer, Northern (1,158,000 Speakers)

Primary Religion: Buddhism

% Christian Adherents: Data not available

% Evangelical: Data not available

Persecution Index: Not stated