Title:

10 Steps to Prepare for Your Holiday in Phuket:

Content:

1. *Do your research!*

Phuket is a beautiful Island with some of the friendliest people you’ll ever meet. One attribute that makes this place so special is its religious practices and emphasis on spirituality, which radiates through the affectionate locals as well as within the many surrounding Buddhist temples and shrines. In order to blend seamlessly amongst the people that inhabit this harmonious place, it is very important to understand the local customs. This not only offers respect to the residents, but it also ensures you’ll be treated with the upmost respect from them in return. As such, it is strongly advised that you do your research! To make it a little easier, we’ve included the basic customs that you’ll want to know when travelling through Thailand.

- The *Wai* is the traditional greeting in Thailand, that you will almost inevitably encounter immediately, and more than once. This is essential in Thai culture to show your gratitude for another person, to express thanks, or to say ‘hello’ and ‘goodbye’. To do so, simply press your palms together at chest level and bow your head slightly.

- Do not speak ill of the royal family. Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, with the royal family being regarded very, VERY highly around the country. You will quickly realise this when visiting, as the King’s image is posted here, there and everywhere. To show your respect, always stand when the King’s anthem is being played, and refrain from making remarks about the royal family. In fact, speaking poorly of the royal family is punishable by imprisonment. So basically, just don’t do it.

- Buddhism teachings say the head is the most valued part of the human body, with the feet representing that of the opposite, a symbol for human suffering. Its for this reason that locals don’t touch the head of others, nor do they point their feet at people or religious symbols. It is strongly advised that you do not ignore this local custom.

1. Perfect your haggling skills (did someone say savings?)

Phuket is renowned for its many markets that grace the bustling streets of Phuket and beyond from dusk ‘til dawn. With many great deals just waiting to be snapped up, first priority is perfecting your haggling skills. I for one wasn’t a confident haggler at the beginning of my holiday in Patong, Phuket’s fanatical tourist hub, yet after about 2 days I soon became the bartering expert. By doing so, I bought everything for at least half the asking price. Well worth the practice wouldn’t you say? With that being said however, I ended up leaving Patong with enough summer clothes to last the next three years, despite retuning to an especially cold winter in Melbourne. Its always better to be prepared though, right?

1. *Get your international license*

Tuk-Tuks and taxis are among the most popular forms of transport throughout Phuket, with services on every corner, literally. However, for those that want to guide themselves around this beautiful island, with the leisure to stop wherever you please, hiring a motorbike or moped is a fantastic way to do so. But there are a few key things to remember before donning the leather jacket, including getting your international license. Many reviews will tell you that simply having a valid license from your own country is enough, and in some cases this is true, however it’s really not worth taking the risk if it means forking over your hard-earned spending money to a policeman. What’s more, be very careful on the road and be sure to get insurance. Thai streets can get a little crazy from time to time, so its important to be completely confident on the road before hiring a motorbike. Avoid riding in wet weather and always, ALWAYS wear a helmet (mum speech over).

Rates will differ depending on where you hire your motorbike or moped from, however to give you a ballpark figure, we paid about 500 Thai Baht per day, that’s around USD $15.

1. *Develop your palette for spice*

Thai food is a personal favourite of mine, so its safe to say I was more than eager to tuck into the many fragrant flavours and textures that make up this mouthwatering cuisine. One step off the plane and I had Green Curry and Pad Thai in my sights, so quickly after settling into our hotel room, we set off for the closest restaurant. Now, I can handle a bit of spice, there’s no denying this fact, but the curry we had that night was hot enough to challenge even the most experienced of pallettes. Although undeniably the most delicious Thai food I’ve ever had, I can’t help but wish I had trained my threshold for heat before visiting. But don’t worry, if you’re not down for spicy food at all, you can request mild, or completely boycott the cuisine altogether. Phuket has equally as many ‘Western’ restaurants as Thai… but where’s the fun in that?

1. *Pack a tube (or 3) of sunscreen*

Phuket is famous for its comparatively cheap prices; from food to clothing, services and transport. But unfortunately, decent sunscreen is not one of those things. For a tube of sunscreen (that actually protects you from the sun), you’re looking at about USD $22, which for most of us, is simply astronomical. Due to the particularly harsh Thai sun, I strongly recommend pre-purchasing a few bottles or tubes before heading off to Phuket, and speaking from someone who avoided making the purchase until it was too late, don’t skip out on this one guys.

1. *Practice your boat legs*

Phuket boasts some of the world’s most beautiful islands discovered world wide. The likes of Phi Phi, the Similan Islands, Coral Island and Koh Bon are some of the most revered in the area, and very popular amongst tourists. With varying distances between each island and the mainland of Phuket, you’re looking at trips of up to an hour. You really don’t want to skip out on this part of Phuket, so preparing for a few boat trips here and there is strongly advised.

1. *Get walking!*

Exploring Phuket by foot is an excellent way to discover the hidden beauties of this stunning island. From romantic strolls along the beach, to full-blown hikes around Phuket’s tropical national parks, walking from time to time is inevitable. Khao Phra Thaaw National Park is one of Phuket’s last remaining forests that haven’t been altered by humans, with countless protected species of plants and animals finding their home in this tropical paradise. The perfect place to put your fitness to the test. What’s more the park has a number of trails with the added offer of guided tours, taking you all the way to the stunning natural Ton Sai waterfall. However, there are a few others around Phuket so perhaps conduct a little research before heading off, and get walking!

1. *Pack clothing that covers your knees and elbows*

Although its tempting to ditch any item of clothing that isn’t shorts, singlets and dresses when heading off to Phuket, if you want to enter any of its temples you must wear something that covers your knees and elbows. So don’t dismiss them just yet. Once again, this practice simply comes down to a matter of respect. Entering a Buddhist temple in Phuket also requires that you remove your shoes, hats and sunglasses, so make sure you’ve got a safe place to store them. Additionally, when entering any of Phuket’s temples, make sure you remember not point your bare feet at the religious symbols or structures.

Aaaand, just in case you forget any of what was just said, many of Phuket’s temples have a range of sarongs to take for free while you’re visiting, allowing you to walk through the temple even if you’ve forgotten to dress modestly.

*Hot Tip:* Wat Chalong, Big Buddha and Khao Rang were my favourite temples to visit during my stay, and well worth your time.

1. *Get your Vaccinations*

Traveling to another country usually requires that you get at least one vaccination, whether it be the United States, Australia, Thailand and beyond. This is because our body hasn’t yet built an immunity against local viruses. Common vaccinations recommended for those traveling to Phuket are Hepatitis A&B, Malaria and Typhoid. However, it is very important that you check with your local GP to clarify any concerns or questions regarding vaccinations.

Another great tip is packing some sort of hand sanitation. This will prevent the spread of germs and significantly reduce your chance of getting sick. After all, you don’t want to spend your holiday tucked up in bed.

1. *And last, but certainly not least, get excited!*

Phuket is one of the most beautiful places I have had the pleasure of experiencing, and I would recommend it to families, groups of friends, traveling couples or retirees; because there truly is something for everyone in this tropical island paradise. But like anywhere you visit, there are a few things to prepare for first, so make sure you take some (or ideally all) of our advice on board to ensure you have the most enjoyable holiday possible.

And happy travelling, travellers!