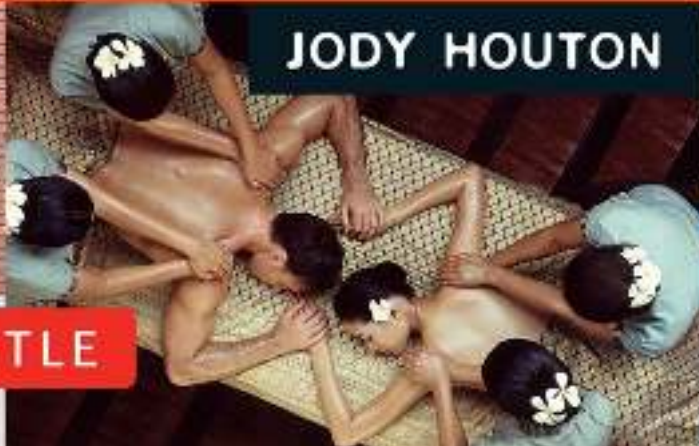




# A GEEK IN THAILAND

Discovering the Land of Golden Buddhas, Pad Thai and Kickboxing



JODY HOUTON



TUTTLE

*A Geek in Thailand* is a light-hearted but perceptive look at one of the world's most visited countries from the viewpoint of a young foreign resident. It offers a concise but insightful take on Thailand for tourists, expats, would-be expats, and others—anyone, in fact, with an interest in visiting or learning about the Land of Smiles. Packed with short articles accompanied by sidebar stories and interviews and evocative color photographs, the author paints a vivid and revealing picture of a country built on a deep reverence for nation, religion and monarchy, yet with its own distinct, individualistic perspective.

Subjects range from the touchstones of Thai history and culture, such as its politics and economy, Buddhism and folklore, to chapters on traditional Thai design and craftsmanship, including its highly acclaimed architecture and fine silk textiles. There are also chapters on the globally popular Thai food and entertainment like kickboxing and cabaret. Chapters on the Thai character and cultural do's and don'ts will allow the reader to go beyond the Thai smile. For visitors to the country, the author includes his top ten things to see and do in the main tourist destinations as well as an account of the main festivals and tips on getting around. *A Geek in Thailand* contains tidbits that on the surface may seem as weird as they are wonderful but are sure to spark the reader's interest.



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# HARMONY, DISORDER AND SMILES

**A visit to Thailand is likely to be an infuriating, alienating and head-scratching experience that will also provide the most wonderful and welcoming of culture shocks.**

Thailand assaults the senses with an overload of activity—an explosion of colors, sound, sights, smells and tastes. It possesses a seductive spirituality born not only from Buddhist values but from an ancient animist approach that has its origins in the country's folklores and forests.

This book is an attempt to understand one of the world's most visited countries—but go beyond the usual tourist brochures and guidebooks. *A Geek in Thailand* is an exploration of why Thailand at once appears so foreign and chaotic yet familiar and ordered. Through a journey that includes understanding the complex cacophony of components that make up Thailand's food, noise levels, politics, traffic and contradictory character traits, we will begin to discover how seeking a balance, a harmony and a level of calm in all these integral elements is at the heart of the soul and culture of the country and essence of being Thai.

## **LOOKS CAN BE DECEPTIVE**

Although young Thai men may wear T-shirts bearing the names of Western bands and cheer for English football teams on Saturday nights, and although Thai women may wear the latest fashions and cultivate looks championed by their Japanese and Korean counterparts, Thais are inexplicably unique in their outlook. There is pride in the nation's individualistic Thai perspective that stems not only from it being the only Southeast Asian country to ever resist colonization by Western powers but also from the deep reverence and respect for the intrinsic national Thai values of Nation, Religion and Monarchy.



The Thai New Year, Songkran, is perhaps the world's biggest water fight.



Being happy in Thailand is important, and there are even military-led campaigns to encourage it.

The longer you stay in Thailand, the more questions you are likely to ask. To understand Thailand, you must have a knowledge of its geographical position and the influence of its neighbors. To understand Thai people, you must at least know of the one-time existence of more than 50 ethnic groups that were ‘unified’ and rebranded ‘Thai’ by one of the country’s most controversial and influential 20th-century prime ministers. To understand the Thai national character, you must have an awareness of its people’s propensity to smile, to save face, and to respect the ‘tribe’ above all else. To understand Thailand is to understand the political divisions of its people, which at times seem to manifest itself as little more than a preference for a particular color of clothing.



Tourists on a jungle trek in Maetang get a good soaking.



The infamous Full Moon Party in Koh Phangan has become a rite of passage for young visitors.



Just dance: A cheerleading flash mob performing in Bangkok.



Writing this book has involved adventures down alleyways, gallons of coffee in cafes, thousands of emails and phone calls and fascinating days spent with professors, expert artists, musicians, writers, street vendors, waitresses, taxi drivers, businessmen and everyday Thais who make up the eclectic mix of contemporary Thai society.

This project has also, perhaps most importantly, been inspired and motivated by each and every stranger's smile, a reminder to this English geek of why he wanted to write a book about their country and culture in the first place.

## LIVING THE HOLIDAY DREAM

The story of how I came to live in Thailand is quite a common one for those who choose the 'Land of Smiles' as their adopted homeland. I came for a holiday, well no, actually, that's not entirely true.... I came seeking relaxation, to de-stress at the end of a joyless English-teaching contract in Korea. Rather than return to the gray and dreary streets of my hometown of Manchester in the UK where I would be twiddling my thumbs until my Masters course in journalism began, I went to Thailand at the suggestion of my girlfriend at the time.

I headed straight for the holiday island of Phuket. I think it was on day three while I was sitting on the sand at Kata beach looking out at the water and the cliffs and peaks and distant green hills, that the hustle and bustle and toil and trouble of my recent time in Korea began to feel like years, not mere days away.

I stayed in Phuket for a month, writing the odd travel article for a local newsmagazine to help subsidize my English breakfasts, bowls of chicken fried rice and bottles of Singha beer. Being a sun-starved Mancunian, I then decided to do some more beach-hopping and ended up on the more remote and less developed (at the time) island of Samui. I stayed in the Fisherman's Village, a lovely little beachside town with cheap accommodation and a lively selection of bars and foreign and Thai restaurants. I spent my days jogging on the beach and learning shorthand and writing. In the evenings I worked my way through a seemingly never-ending menu of delicious spicy, sour and sweet Thai dishes to the sounds of live music.



I've met many interesting people in my time in Thailand. Performance artist and *Thailand's Got Talent* contestant Romado is definitely in my top three.

The time for me to return to the UK, and the responsibilities associated with it, was drawing ever closer. I decided that I should at least make an attempt at seeing another side of Thailand, something different from the idyllic paradise-like corners of the earth. I went to Bangkok, then to Chiang Mai and finally to Ayutthaya. In Bangkok I saw an urban Asian metropolis that straddled modernity and tradition and poverty and wealth like no other capital city I had ever visited. In Chiang Mai I saw a beautiful city surrounded by breathtaking countryside, with wonderful wildlife and awesome architecture, temples and ruins, and in Ayutthaya I experienced a glimpse of the Thailand of the past.

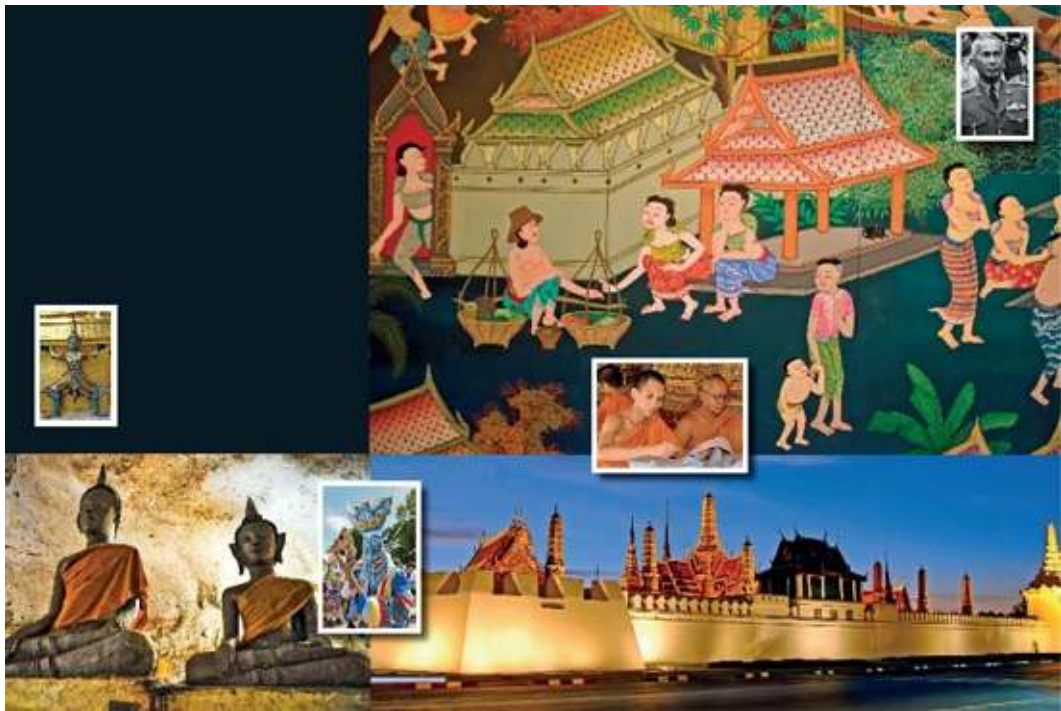
I had spent three months in Thailand, a lengthy holiday by any stretch of the imagination. But the fact that as soon as I had completed my Masters degree, I looked at ways of returning to Thailand is testament to the attraction of the country, to the fact that everything just seems so dull, so gray, so cold, so non-spicy and so un-Thai in comparison.

Like many expats who choose Thailand as their adopted home, I came for a holiday and stayed for the laid-back lifestyle. I came because I loved something about Thailand, something that I couldn't quite put my finger on. When I left seven years earlier, I wasn't quite sure what it was, but I was determined to find out. So I returned and began to work for the same newsmagazine I had written for during my initial visit. For my first Christmas in Thailand, I bought a Christmas tree, but when January came around I threw the little plastic thing out as I doubted I'd be there when the bells started jingling again. After three more tree-less Christmas festive periods, I admitted to myself that I should probably buy one again. I now live and work in Bangkok.

As with most other expats in Thailand, there have been times when I've wanted to tear my hair out with the 'Thai' way of doing things, but the anger and incredulity always pass and I remain, with a smile on my face and a Christmas tree and water pistol for Songkran in my cupboard.

# CHAPTER 1

## THAI HISTORY AND CULTURE



How did ancient Siam come to be the colorful country of contemporary Thailand? Here, we will discover some of the most famous, influential and controversial Thais, both past and present. Religion, Nation, Monarchy are at the heart of Thai culture and are where, as geeks in Thailand, we will begin.

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# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THAILAND

The ancient kingdom of Siam—from the Sanskrit word *Syama*, meaning ‘dark’ or ‘brown’—was renamed Thailand in 1948.

This was, in fact, the second time the country’s name had changed. Siam was first renamed Thailand in 1939, at the onset of World War II, by then Prime Minister Field Marshal Luan ‘Plaek’ Phibunsongkhram who believed the name change would whip up much-needed ultranationalist spirit to unify or at least inform the approximately 50 ethnic groups resident in the country that it was a land for ‘Tais’, the dominant ethnic group at the time.

Although Thailand’s hosting of Japanese forces and perceived alignment with the Japanese in World War II was retrospectively deemed to have been ‘under duress’ as opposed to being ‘allied’ (Thailand was ‘occupied’ by 150,000 Japanese troops), it was decided to revert to the pre-war name Siam at the end of the war, in 1945.

## WHAT’S IN A NAME?

The word Thai in the Thai language means ‘independence’, leading many to believe the choice of name refers to Thailand’s ability to resist attempts at Western colonization, the only Southeast Asian country to successfully do so. Others believe the name refers to those who were to become the country’s most populous and dominant group of people—the Tais. The Tais were initially an ethnic group hailing from southern China, who migrated into the Chao Phraya River valley in central Thailand around AD 1000, an area already inhabited by two main Austro-Asiatic groups speaking Mon and Khmer. Present-day Thais are the product of the assimilation and fusion of these three groups.

In recent years, some Thai scholars, including historian Charnvit Kasetsiri, have called on the country to revert to its original name, Siam. Although the widespread practice of Theravada Buddhism has promoted racial harmony, Charnvit points out that it was only when the country became known as Thailand—‘a land for Tais’—that its 50 other ethnic groups currently residing alongside the Tais, including Yuan, Lao, Malayu, Karen, Hmong, Chinese and, most recently, *farang* (people of European descent), were discriminated against and dissuaded from expressing their customs, dress and language in favor of a unified Thai existence or Thai-ness. Charnvit believes that a return to the name Siam would be the first step in signaling that not only the country’s past but also its present is made up of many different ethnicities and ideologies, and is the only way to bring about reconciliation of its mosaic of peoples and cultures.

Field Marshal Plaek was subsequently forced out of office and put on trial for war crimes but was acquitted owing to strong Thai public support. In 1947, he led a coup and once again became prime minister. The following year Siam, for the second and final time, became Thailand.

## THAILAND'S FOUR KINGDOMS

Thailand has gone through a myriad of changes and been exposed to numerous influences throughout its history. The existence of a number of separate, distinct and often co-existing Thai kingdoms has been largely responsible for the formation of the multifaceted Thailand we know today.

**Sukhothai** The Sukhothai kingdom of Thailand (1238–1448) is considered to be the 'Golden Age of Thailand'. As the first independent Thai state following the decline of the Khmer empire in the early 13th century, it is also believed to signal the beginning of modern Thai history.



The Sukhothai kingdom was a prosperous and plentiful place for the country and its people, one where 'rivers were full of fish and fields of rice'. It was also a time of relative peace, with good relationships with neighboring countries. During the Sukhothai period, it was believed that kings would keep bells outside of their palaces. If any subject had a grievance, he would ring the bell and the king would come to the gate and dispense justice accordingly. This leadership style was later to become known as 'father governs children' and is still relevant today, not only in the palace but also in the hierarchy of Thai companies and organizations.

Although its authenticity has subsequently been questioned, the Thai alphabet was created

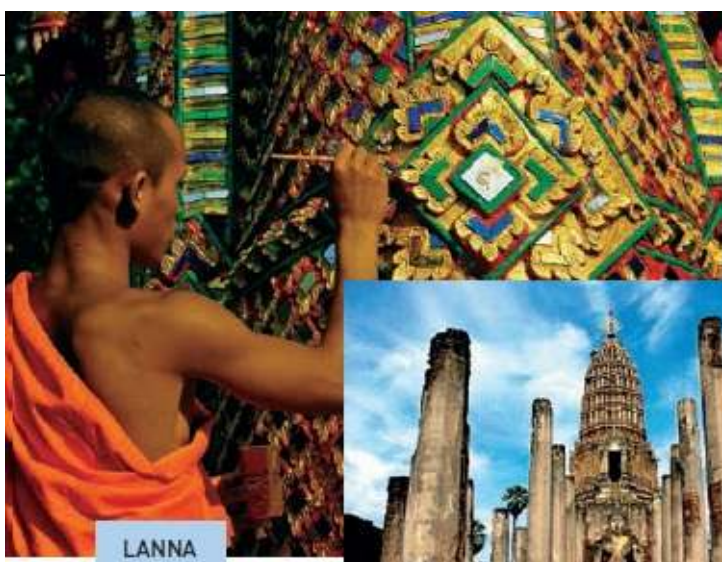
by King Ramkhamhaeng during this period, evidenced by the discovery of an inscribed tablet, the Ramkhamhaeng Stele. In the script, the king speaks of his benevolent leadership style. King Ramkhamhaeng's 'paternal rule' and the culture and traditions of Sukhothai were later to take on further significance during the 1932 pro-democracy revolution, when scholars argued that it was the 'Golden Age of Thailand' that, in fact, had given birth to what was to become a peculiarly Thai style of democracy.



**Ayutthaya** The Ayutthaya kingdom (1350–1767) is perhaps the best-known ancient Thai kingdom as its capital is still resplendent with historical buildings and artifacts. This period of Thai history witnessed huge economic growth as well as the establishment of relations with foreign traders, especially the Portuguese. With great power came great change and during the Ayutthaya period Thai society became distinctly hierarchical, with the large majority of Thais working as slaves or serfs for landowners, nobles and officials. Unlike the paternalistic rule of the Sukhothai period, the kings of Ayutthaya had absolute power and were perceived as incarnations of gods.

The Ayutthaya period was integral in developing the Thai arts where all members of society, from court officials to artisans and scholars of Buddhist learning joined together to make and decorate the area's temples and palaces.

But this period in Thai history was also fraught with wars and battles with Burma, which led to the ultimate sacking of the city in 1767 and subsequent destruction of a large number of records, palaces and temples. Despite this, for a long period during the Ayutthaya reign the kingdom was largely considered to be the strongest power in mainland Southeast Asia.



LANNA



THONBURI AND RATTANAKOSIN

**Lanna** Much like the Sukhothai kingdom, the Lanna kingdom, which ruled from the 13th to 15th century in northern Thailand, had an incredible influence on Thai society and culture and is still nostalgically regarded.

The Lanna kingdom co-existed during the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya kingdoms, and at its height its power and influence were said to have rivaled Ayutthaya's with whom it had repeated battles and skirmishes. It was during this period that Lanna's culture and traditions of what is widely considered as the cultural capital of Thailand, Chiang Mai, were developed and firmly entrenched in Thai culture. Lanna architecture, woodcraft and masonry are easily identifiable and revered today. The kingdom eventually fell to the Burmese in 1558 but returned as a vassal state of Siam in the latter part of the 18th century.

**Thonburi and Rattanakosin** King Taksin the Great of Thonburi managed to reunite the country the following year, which gave birth to Thailand's shortest reigning kingdom, the brief reign of the Thonburi kingdom (1768–82). The capital of Siam was moved to Thonburi and located on the opposite side of the Chao Phraya River where Bangkok now stands. As a result of numerous internal political problems, King Taksin was reported to have succumbed to stress and was subsequently ordained as a monk, disappearing from sight.

Because of its more advantageous position, Bangkok was then chosen as the new capital city, and in 1782 King Buddha Yodfa Chulaloke (Rama I) took over and became the first Chakri (royal ruling house) king in the Rattanakosin kingdom—the dynasty that presently encompasses Thailand.

## SIAMESE TWINS

Chang and Eng Bunker (1811–74), who were joined at the sternum, were perhaps the first two Siamese men known to the larger world. Commonly known as the 'Siamese Twins', they toured the world as an exhibit of interest before settling and marrying two sisters in North Carolina, USA. Owing to

their Chinese ancestry, they were known as the 'Chinese Twins' in Siam.



King Rama V, widely considered one of the greatest kings of Siam.



King Rama IV, who provided the inspiration for the play and movie, *The King and I*.

## **ROYALTY IN THAILAND**



The monarchy in Thailand is highly revered and staunchly protected by the lèse-majesté law. The current King of Thailand, Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), is the world's longest serving monarch and is dearly loved by the people of Thailand.

A testament to the Thai people's love for the king and the royal family, past and present, is the sheer number of royal portraits in premises throughout the Thai social structure, including homes, factories, offices and roadside garages.

Whether Thai or not, you are expected to show the utmost respect for the Thai royal family, and on occasions that demand it, such as before movie screenings and football matches, stand for the Thai national anthem, which is also played at 8 am and 6 pm every day. In public places, such as busy train platforms or market places, where the anthem is often broadcast through loudspeakers, it is remarkable to see everybody come to a halt.

**Color of Love** According to both Thai and Khmer astrology, each day of the week is associated with a particular color. As King Bhumibol was born on a Monday, which is associated with yellow, the most loyal of royalists can be identified by their choice of yellow clothing on Mondays. Blue garb is also a popular color to wear on Fridays out of respect for Queen Sirikit's birthday.

**The King's Predecessors** Another much-respected member of the monarchy from the Chakri dynasty was King Rama IV or King Mongkut. Reigning from 1851 to 1868, he was known as the 'Father of Science and Technology' for embracing Western technologies and innovations, effectively beginning Thailand's modernization process. He also hired English and American missionaries to teach the princes English, and Western mercenaries to train Siamese troops.

King Mongkut's son, Chulalongkorn the Great, otherwise known as King Rama V (1868-1910), was also a hugely popular king. He is credited with abolishing the slave trade in Thailand, (depicted on the back of the B100 note), building railways, introducing electricity and through various reforms in the Thai feudal system and his influence in 'modernizing Siam', continuing to save the country from Western colonization.

## The Man Who Brought Democracy

One Thai who has had immeasurable influence on modern Thailand is former prime minister Pridi Banomyong. He was one of the leaders of the 1932 Pro-Democracy Coup that saw the end of absolute monarchy and the adoption of the current and more popular constitutional monarchy. Pridi helped draft a new constitution and was, and still is, seen as a controversial figure in Thai history. He spent his remaining years in exile in France. After a generation overseas, his grandson, Ariya Banomyong, has returned to Thailand and is the current manager of Google in Thailand.



## Making Siam 'Civilized'

Another influential but controversial figure among Thais is Field Marshal Luang 'Plaek' (Strange) Phibunsongkhram, who is also a former prime minister of Thailand. Phibunsongkhram was charged with inculcating a sense of nationalism among Thai people during his time in the National Assembly and the Thai military. Through various mandates, he ordered the Thais to learn the national anthem, salute the flag in public and communicate in public only in the Thai language.

Phibunsongkhram was also responsible for promoting the use of forks and spoons instead of hands for eating and adopting more Western attire. Indeed, up until a 1940 Thai Cultural Mandate, the common traditional costume for women, especially in rural areas, was a wrapped sarong and little else. Despite being the son of a Chinese immigrant, he was also responsible for the launch of numerous anti-Chinese policies and the closing down of Chinese schools all over Thailand. Many older Thai people remember him for his simple and easy-to-remember mandate of 'Wear a hat and become civilized.'

Like his political nemesis Pridi, Phibunsongkhram died in exile, his final years being spent in Japan.



Field Marshal Luang 'Plaek' (Strange) Phibunsongkhram

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# THE COLOR OF POLITICS

**Thaksin Shinawatra is a former prime minister of Thailand (2001–6) who remains both revered and disliked. After courting previously neglected rural Thai voters, he won two landslide election victories and arguably changed the face of Thai politics forever. Many of his policies, including providing universal affordable health coverage and low-interest agricultural loans, were hugely effective and consolidated his support base among the poorer classes.**

Thaksin's emerging power and popularity unsettled the élite, the middle classes and Thailand's traditional establishment who had, almost exclusively, been in the political driving seat for decades.

Thaksin is also controversial for leading Thailand's 'War on Drugs', which saw around 2,275 drug traffickers and addicts killed over a three-month period in 2003. The government claimed that only 50 deaths were the result of police actions, the rest being assassinations and revenge attacks by drug dealers and gangs. In 2006, the telecommunications billionaire was stripped of his family fortune of \$1.4 billion by the Supreme Court after being found guilty of corruption. Since then, half has been returned. He lives in self-imposed exile in Dubai following protests led by the conservative royalist People's Alliance for Democracy (its supporters known as Yellow Shirts), which overthrew his government in December 2006 while he was abroad—one of 19 military coups and attempted coups since the founding of the constitutional monarchy in 1932.

After Abhisit Vejjajiva from the People's Alliance for Democracy replaced Thaksin as prime minister, supporters of Thaksin, made up of mostly poor and rural Thais, known colloquially as Red Shirts, have clashed many times with the Yellow Shirts. During the tenure of what the Red Shirts consider the illegal, undemocratic and unlawful appointment of Abhisit, there have been numerous Red Shirt protests. The most notable occurred in 2010, when hundreds of thousands of Red Shirt protesters took to the streets. Violent clashes between the protesters and the military left 92 dead and more than 2,000 injured.



A protestor waves a flag at the popular pro-democracy site, the Victory Monument, in Bangkok.



Thousands gathered every day in the capital, listening to speeches, attending rallies and mainly blowing whistles.



Many of the protesters in 2013–14 were unified in their anti-Shinawatra sentiments.

In 2011, Thaksin's sister Yingluck Shinawatra, leader of the Pheu Thai party, was elected prime minister. One of the populist policies on the Pheu Thai party's agenda for 2013 was to pass a blanket amnesty bill which would have retroactively exonerated political criminals from crimes they had committed. This would have allowed her exiled brother Thaksin Shinawatra to return to Thailand without fear of charges. Needless to say, the Thai people opposed and supported the plan in equal numbers.

## **Support for Sale**

The Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts are not officially aligned with any political party. Rather, they are independent supporter groups. Many believe that the two high-profile supporter groups could one day officially launch their own political parties.

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## WHAT TO DO BUT LAUNCH A COUP

When Yingluck Shinawatra, the leader of the Pheu Thai Party, won a landslide victory in the 2011 elections, many Thais were prepared to give her a chance despite the fact that she was the sister of the deposed Thaksin Shinawatra. For others, old wounds heal slowly and allegations came swiftly that she was merely a puppet for a political party that Thaksin would still be controlling.

The final straw for the non-believers came in November 2013 when Yingluck attempted to pass a broad amnesty bill that would, in effect, allow Thaksin to return to Thailand where he would not face any charges nor serve the two years in prison that he was sentenced to in absentia, and, most controversially, have all his seized assets returned. Anti-government protests quickly formed up and down the country, especially in Democrat stronghold areas like Bangkok and Phuket, with pockets of protesters traveling to Bangkok to join the street marches. Their aim, as seen on various items of merchandise made quickly available, was to Shut Down Bangkok in order to Restart Bangkok.



## SUTHEP STEPS UP

Former Democrat Party Secretary-General Suthep Thaugsuban quickly became a figurehead and spokesperson for the anti-government protesters, and later formed the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC). Fearing that the present government was so corrupt that any elections or attempted reforms would be rejected or dealt with unfairly, he called for Yingluck to be ousted in favor of installing an unelected people's council. His aims were dismissed, mainly by outside foreign and international observers, as fanciful and unrealistic. Despite this, Suthep and the protesters, clad in merchandise emblazoned with the Thai flag, continued marching every day, whistles blowing. Donations were collected, often by Suthep himself, which went to cover the cost of providing food and water for the faithful. Protesters

set up camp on the streets and even in Lumpini Park and there were regular concerts and speeches to boost morale.

In December 2013, Yingluck dissolved the House of Representatives and scheduled a general election for February 2014. She ignored plans to step down in the interim, maintaining that it was her duty to continue to lead the country as a caretaker prime minister.

## **DON'T VOTE FOR DEMOCRACY**

In the run up to election day, February 2, anti-government protesters called on the Thai people not to vote and on the day itself blocked many polling stations, preventing people from voting. They feared that despite all their whistle blowing, the vast majority of Thais (in the rural north of Thailand at least) would go ahead and vote in a party that was sympathetic to the Red Shirt (Thaksin Shinawatra) cause and all the marching and blowing of whistles would have been for nothing. It was a minor victory for the PDRC but not for democracy, as the elections were nullified in March. This enraged pro-government supporters and there were numerous Red Shirt protests held in retaliation, mainly in the north. As the weeks progressed there were also mounting rumors that the protesters might be heading to Bangkok. In the meantime, skirmishes between protesters and riot police in the capital had turned violent leading to 28 deaths, including those of two child protesters. Each group blamed the other and accused the police of siding with the opposing faction.

## **IT'S NOT A COUP (REALLY...)**

Something had to be done. In May 2014, following six months of protests, Yingluck and nine other ministers were removed from office by the Constitutional Court. A few weeks later martial law was imposed under a law promulgated by King Rama VI almost a hundred years earlier to the day.

Like many generals before him, General Prayut Chan-o-cha, Commander of the Royal Thai Army, launched a coup d'état against the caretaker government. The junta was known as the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO).

From the outset, General Prayut was quick to point out that what was taking place was not a military coup in the traditional sense of the word and there would be no violence. In fact, he stated that the coup was launched to prevent the kind of violence that was being seen at the time in Ukraine. Many Thais and visiting foreigners seemed to agree, with some posing for pictures with bemused soldiers holding machine guns.



## HAPPINESS FESTIVALS

Throughout the month of June 2014, the Royal Thai Army staged a number of 'Happiness Festivals' in the capital, including at the highly symbolic site of the Victory Monument, popular with protesters past and present, with the aim of restoring happiness to the people. Activities included music concerts, free movie screenings, a petting zoo, free haircuts, free meals and even a sexy coyote performance.

Apart from a few tourists intent on obtaining a soldier selfie, there were many more who were wary of the political situation in Thailand and visitor numbers plummeted.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand hit upon the idea of promoting Martial Law Tourism, stating that, in fact, the country was now safer than ever, what with soldiers, machine guns at the ready, guarding the streets.

Following the murder of two British backpackers in late 2014, the Thai Tourism Minister stated that she had another idea to ensure the safety of the country's visitors: every single one of them would be asked to wear a wristband containing a serial number that corresponded with their ID, which would work much like a sort of rudimentary tracking device. It was met with a mixture of incredulity and ridicule and the idea was soon dropped. A curfew for tourists was another idea that was quickly dismissed.

From July 2014 onwards, the sight of soldiers in the streets became less and less common and life returned to as normal as it has ever been for the Thai people.

Despite the 'it's not a coup' claims, a curfew was swiftly imposed from 10 am to 5 pm which quickly had the desired effect of removing the protest camps that were sporadically placed throughout the capital and elsewhere in the country, regardless of color.

## BACK TO 'NORMAL'

Once the coup was imposed and the country was, for the twelfth time, under military rule Thailand began to return to a sense of military normalcy that almost every generation since 1932 had experienced at one time or another. Suthep shaved his head, joined the monkhood and disappeared from public view for the next few months, while Yingluck went abroad to catch up with her brother. Towards the end of the year, however, she began to be spotted at glitzy events in the capital. The good times weren't to last, however. In January 2015 Yingluck, despite no longer being in office, was impeached and banned from participating in politics for five years.

The NCPO had cleared the streets and seemed to have been successful in reminding the two warring factions about what really mattered. All that remained was to try to convince the general public that they were doing the right thing. And so began the Happiness campaign.



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