

# **Thailand (Kingdom of)**

**Last updated: 31-01-2004**

## **Location and area**

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy in South East Asia, bordered on the north and west by Myanmar (Burma), on the northeast by Laos, on the southeast by Cambodia and the Gulf of Thailand (Siam), on the south by Malaysia, and on the southwest by the Andaman Sea. The total area of Thailand is 513,115 km<sup>2</sup>. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

## **Topography**

A series of parallel mountain ranges, with a north-south trend, occupy the northern and western portions of the country. Extreme elevations occur in the westernmost ranges, which extend along the Burmese frontier and rise to 2,595 m at Doi Inthanon, the highest point in Thailand. The peninsular area, which is bordered by narrow coastal plains, reaches a high point of 1,786 m at Khao Luang. Another mountain system projects, in a northern and southern direction, through central Thailand. At its southern extremity, the system assumes an east-west trend and extends to the eastern frontier. Doi Pia Fai (1,270 m) is its highest peak. The region to the north and east of this system consists largely of a low, barren plateau, called the Khorat Plateau. Making up about one-third of the country, the plateau is bordered by the Mekong River valley. Between the central and western mountains is a vast alluvial plain traversed by the Chao Phraya, the chief river of Thailand. This central plain, together with the fertile delta formed by the Chao Phraya near Bangkok, is the richest agricultural region and most densely populated section of the kingdom. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

## **Climate**

Thailand has a moist, tropical climate, influenced chiefly by monsoon winds that vary in direction according to the season. From April to October the winds are mainly from the southwest and are moisture laden; during the rest of the year they blow from the northeast. Temperatures are higher, ranging from 26° to 37° C, while the country is under the influence of the south-west winds. During the remainder of the year the range is from 13° to 33° C. Temperatures are somewhat higher inland than they are along the coast, except at points of great elevation.

Annual rainfall is about 1,500 mm in the northern, western, and central regions, 2,500 mm or more on the Thai portion of the Malay Peninsula, and 1,250 mm or less on the Khorat Plateau. Most rain falls from June to October. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

## **Land use**

Thailand is one of the world's leading producers of rice. About 29 % of the total land area is forested. The most valuable forest product is hardwood. Jungles, mangroves, and swamps scatter through the coastal areas of Thailand (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

## **Peatlands**

Shrier (1985), referring to the FAO/UNESCO 1971-1981 Soil Map of the World 1:5,000,000, mentions a "mire area" and an area of Histosols of 680 km<sup>2</sup>. They are found on the east coast,

just north of the Malayan border and represent an extension of the coastal swamp forest found on peninsular Malaysia.

Bord na Mona (1984) and Andriessse (1988) estimate the extent of organic soils in Thailand to be 680 km<sup>2</sup>. The same figure is used by Schneider & Schneider (1990) and Pfadenhauer et al. (1993) for peatlands.

For Southern Thailand, Katz (1971) mentions forest-peatlands.

Rieley et al. (1996a) estimate the extent of “peat swamps” in Thailand at 680 km<sup>2</sup>,

Rieley (1997) presents an “undisturbed peatland” area in Thailand of 680 km<sup>2</sup>.

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) 394 km<sup>2</sup> of histosols exist in Thailand and 45,069 km<sup>2</sup> of gley soils.