



## Nine tips for soft landing in South East Asia

### Description

Once in a while (let's say every other day) people address with all sorts of requests for assistance. Families planning to go on the road, asking for tips, advices, connections, help, Excel spreadsheets. We're always happy to help, but sometimes our gut feeling is so strong that we let them straight into our hearts. That was the case with the Rafaelis and that's how this post was born.

Yuval Rafaeli reached through a facebook friend, after she asked for permission to connect us together and after swearing that he read the entire blog first.

After a swift knowledge test I sent him by mail about the blog (well, I know you say we read it, but still ask questions that prove you didn't!) we set a quick Skype call and it turned out that he tested me about the contents in my blog. When the Rafaelis came out of the closet and let the world know about their plans to travel and start in Goa, I wrote them an excited message and added a hash tag of #you've got confused with your landing destination, but enjoy. I already had that feeling that they were on their way to us in Ko Phangan and what's left is only for them to discover it.

Yadda yadda, a month and bankruptcy of an Indian airline later, they call and announce they are on their way to meet us in Ko Phangan. [My last post](#) broke them.

And then immediately followed intensive Whatsapp conversation and me nagging our resort manager (it was hilarious when he swore to me "I have no more houses available" and I replied with "eyes, you do. Please check again") and a Whatsapp group and telephone and Skype calls. After one specific Skype call when I noticed that Yuval didn't catch even half of the tons of information I poured on him (Yuval, no need to bring a pot or a pan!!) I told him that I will write a post and that should do the job.

So here we go. **How to have a soft landing in East Asia.**

#### **Start in Thailand.**

Thailand is easy to travel, family friendly, a perfect destination to start a trip.

Please forgive me all you India lovers and I admit that I haven't yet been there (unless they fix the internet issue there, nor shall I be there) but I insist. My theory is that all of the India freaks, who will try to persuade you to start your trip in India have already: a "long forgotten how it is to arrive in India for the \*first time\*! And b "not sure at all that they've been there with children. Don't listen to them. Excuse me, it might sound a bit arrogant but they always come back to me upset about not listening to my advice. Some of them do like India, but then they come to Thailand and see the light.

If you decided to start in Thailand and you want to come to the islands in the south then in that case I would definitely consider **flying there from Bangkok**. There are other cheaper ways like night bus (the cheapest and less convenient way, about 15\$ including ferry) or night train. I have two tips in that context : fly to Surat Thani and not Samui. It is much cheaper. You can find flights for 30\$-40\$. We usually take AirAsia.

The other thing is to consider the night train. Why ? Because it is not very expensive (25\$ for a joint ticket with train-bus-ferry combination), it's relatively convenient (there are sleepers where you can get a decent night sleep) and it's an experience. There is something very sterile about landing in Bangkok, hopping over to the other airport (international flights land in BKK, domestic flights depart from DMG) in an air-conditioned taxi and landing in Ko Samui an hour and a half later as if nothing happened. As if your lives haven't changed in less than a day.

A night train with the guy that comes and makes the bunk beds, with the train food (we usually don't eat in the train, but you're welcomed to try it) and the entire train atmosphere. It's an experience! Moreover, a domestic flight might not always be in line with an international flight. And if you have decided to take a **night train**, then it's important to know that there are three options and it's important to choose the right one. Option one " first class. Sleeping chambers. It's like sleeping in a fridge. It's a nightmare. Do not use this option at all costs. Option two " an open air-conditioned car. Every passenger has a bunk bed with curtain, the car is air conditioned but not in a way that freezes you to death all of the night. This is the option to choose. Put handy some socks, blankets and warm shirts (you should get a blanket and a pillow, but still it can get cold). The third option is an open car with fans. This might get too hot. You can enjoy having the ride with an open window only to find out in the morning that you are all covered with soot. I less liked this style of travel. Trains tickets are better bought at the Hua Lumphong main railway station, rather than in agencies, on the same day you plan to travel. If you are in high season it might be better to book a day or two in advance. If your Natives are small enough to sleep head-to-tail style in the same bed then you can also save a ticket.



## Sleeper cabins in night train from Bangkok to Chumphon

Now, if you've already landed in Bangkok a **tip for the taxis in the airport** instead of standing the line relatively long time, leave the arrival hall and go to the departure floor. There you will find recently arrived taxis that would jump on the opportunity to carry some passengers with them rather than return empty back to the city. There are some officers there whistling to every car that waits there too much time, so they're nervous and it's good for you. You will save at least 40 minutes of waiting and perhaps even a few bucks. Make sure you agree on a price in advance or better yet use the meter. Make sure the driver doesn't add high-way fees (unless you do want to use the high way). Taxi from the BKK airport to downtown would cost around 500 baht (13\$) and 300 baht (8\$) from DMG to downtown Bangkok.

**Taxis in Khao San:** the taxis standing along the Khao San and Rambuttri roads are mafia taxis. They somehow belong to the police and they monopolize the market. Not good for us. Always try to stop a passing taxi rather than take the ones lurking and stalking for easy prey. And always insist on using the meter. For example, a taxi from Khao San road to Hua Lumphong should cost no more than 70 baht (2\$) with a meter. You can be asked for 200 baht easily if you don't know that. So don't let them fool you.

**Don't use tuk tuks in Bangkok.** It's always more expensive than a meter taxi. You can ride a tuk tuk once for the sake of the experience, but that's it.

I cannot stress it hard enough. **Buy only one way tickets.** Unlike Europe or America where one-way and two-ways tickets can cost almost the same price, in SEA one-way tickets DO cost half the price. You usually know where you're going to when starting the journey, but you can never tell when and where you will be returning from. And no, apparently a ticket with one free change (of location or time) is not good enough either. I'm talking from personal experience. We lost our return tickets this way.

## Visa to Thailand

Let me do it short and sweet. Despite the fact that The One told me not to get into this topic and despite the million discussions you can find in every internet forum or facebook group of travelers, then here is a disclaimer always check the visas to Thailand issue by yourself. This subject is so dynamic and full of disinformation and rumors rather than facts. What I'm going to write here is to the best of my knowledge and relevant to the time of writing.

In Thailand there's a 30 days free visa on arrival for tourists that you can get in the airport without any required preparations. If that's enough for you then you're done. Once you land in Bangkok simply go to the visa on arrival immigration office and end of story. However, if you arrive for a longer term you need a visa in your passport, and that visa is done in the Thailand embassy in your home country.

There are two advantages I noticed in applying for a visa in your home country. First you don't need to present a return flight ticket (we were requested to so when we applied for a visa in Thai embassy in Singapore and Myanmar, and it was really annoying) and second it's possible to apply for two consecutive single entry visas, each one is valid for 60 days period and can be extended in 30 days more with needing to exit Thailand. It practically gives you 6 months with one exit after 3 months to initiate the second visa. Very recently they have started issuing a new 6 months visa, but it requires exits every 60 days. We think it's less preferable than the two single entry visas that give you a similar period in Thailand, but require one exit less. Take into account that each visa run costs money of transporting the whole family to Myanmar/Laos/Cambodia.

Regarding **visas to the children**, we know that cooler people don't do visas to their children. But we're not that cool and we did visa to ours. However, extending is a different story. Let's just

say that when we left to Myanmar from Bangkok a couple of months ago the children got an "overstay" stamp in their passports. But they didn't fine us for that overstay (adult is required to pay 500 baht for each day of overstay up to a maximum of 20,000 baht). Do with it whatever you choose to do.

**Category**

1. Preparations

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