



A Glance to the Land of Smiles

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Thailand will integrate with the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by the end of this year which means workers can go work anywhere in 10 ASEAN member countries with no tight restriction like before. AEC 2015 is no longer a slogan but a reality that the region's government businesses and people will have to embrace before the year is out. Many people from ASEAN Countries will have the right to work in Thailand across multiple industries.

English will be the language for AEC 2015. Every area of work in Thailand will need personnel with fluent English. Better English means better opportunities. With more job candidates, employers will have tighter criteria for hiring new employees. Those who want to be successful in their career will have to work harder and be more determined about how they want their work life to be.

As a Filipino already working here, I consider myself lucky because for me ASEAN means a competition to a lot of professionals. For almost 3 years working in Thailand, here are the things I have learned and experienced which may be beneficial to some who wishes to work in this beautiful country.

1. The Monarchy

The King of Thailand is the head of the state and his image is everywhere. He is the world's longest serving monarch for more than six decades. Thai people do not tolerate criticism toward him, or the royal family in general because Thais love their King very much and they want to protect him. In fact, from the year he was crowned the King until present, he has done so much for the betterment of the country and the people. Most of his projects are aimed at improving the living condition particularly in the remote rural areas and more importantly to alleviate poverty.

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2. Thai Customs and Cultural Sensitivity

The traditional form of greeting in Thai culture is the *wai* or pressing your palms together at chest or nose level and bowing your head slightly, is a gesture that you will encounter almost everywhere in Thailand. It denotes respect when performed in front of a Buddha image, and can be used to express a hello, thank you, or goodbye.

The head is the most valued part of the body while the feet are the lowest and dirtiest part, symbolizing attachment to the ground and a cause of human suffering. Touching someone's head, especially someone of a higher age or rank, is considered rude and is highly offensive, as is raising feet or pointing them at people or religious objects.

Monks are highly revered in Thai culture, which is mostly Buddhist. Women should take care not to touch monks, recognizable by their bright orange robes. They usually even have their own designated section on buses and ferries too.

In the beginning, it was hard to handle and adjust with Thai culture but culture shock is always normal if it's your first time in a foreign land. Exposing yourself to the environment, people and adopting the culture is an excellent way to get past the culture shock and slowly open your mind to the wonderful things Thailand has to offer.

3. Cost of Living

Expats can experience an ideal combination of convenience and modern luxuries, while enjoying a sensible cost of living in Thailand that is cheaper than many other expat destinations around the world.

Those hired from within the country such as real estate agents, international school teachers and IT specialists, who tend to earn slightly less than more corporate expats, can still manage a comfortable lifestyle while saving. In fact, even English teachers and low-skilled professionals with a minimal income report a high quality of life given the low cost of living.

4. Quality of Life

In terms of the factors considered in determining the quality of life in a country- health, family life, community life, material well being, political stability and security, climate and geography, job security, political freedom and gender equality- Thailand isn't far behind rich cities in the world.

Thailand's quality of life ranks second out of all ASEAN Countries according to United Nations Development Index¹. There's also a large network of expatriates living in Thailand, which makes it easy to search apartments, jobs, and find suggestions for all things local, including easy trips to neighboring Cambodia or Laos when it's time to extend the visa.

5. Travel & Adventure

Thailand is probably the best place to enjoy and explore new locations, food, people and cultures. Thailand is a highly central nation bordered by Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia, with Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines nearby as well. The ease and affordability of transportation in this region makes it easy to travel to all sorts of destinations, both within and outside of Thailand, including tropical jungles, waterfalls, ancient forests, National Parks, sublime ruins, and huge limestone cliffs.

Friendly and fun-loving, exotic and tropical, cultured and historic, Thailand radiates a golden hue from its glittering temples and tropical beaches to the ever-comforting Thai smile.

6. Occupations and Work Visas for Thailand

Recognition of the professional qualifications means that citizens of ASEAN countries can have the chance to be employed in each member countries. Certain professions that ASEAN members have mutually agreed are allowed to work freely across country boundaries. Mutual Recognition Agreements have only been signed for seven professions: engineering, nursing, medical and dental, architecture, surveying, and accountancy². Professionals in these fields can move to other ASEAN Countries to practice, but some professions are still subject to pass the country's licensing test.

Teaching English in the other hand has become increasingly popular and the demand has been gradually multiplying in Thailand. To work legally in Thailand, one important thing is to make sure that you have a signed employment contract and a B visa that includes a work permit.

Future expatriate interested in working in Thailand should be aware, though, that there are certain restrictions on foreign workers and employees.

There are a lot more to know when working in Thailand and there are other things to consider. There may be apprehensions and the emotions can be overwhelming. Along



the way, some of our expectations will not be met. But later on in life, some of the most challenging things that happened while you were in a foreign country may be the best stories to share.

Being skillful and responsible enough will certainly give us a lot of opportunities wherever we may go. Communicating across cultural boundaries, learning a new language, and leadership skills are great assets to become successful.

Thailand is such a wonderful country, with welcoming and naturally friendly people, rich culture, and plenty of job opportunities. Once you are already in Thailand, there is always a feeling that it's just so hard to leave this country.

References

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2. Association of Southeast Asian Nation. Mutual Recognition Arrangements.[Internet]. [cited 2015 September 1]. Available from: <http://www.asean.org/communities/asean-economic-community/category/services>