

Newsletter:

Thailand Update

4 June 2014



WSDC

World Schools Debating Championship

2014 Bangkok
Thailand



COMPASS
INSTITUTE

Dear all WSDC community

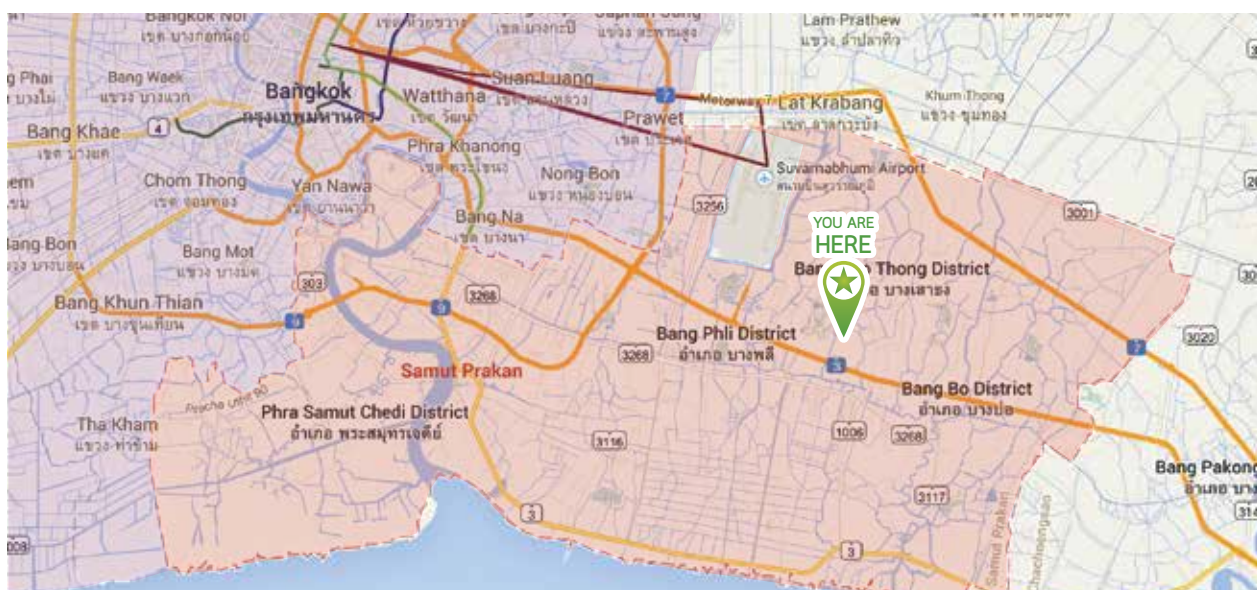
After Thailand was in the grip of political deadlock for nearly half a year, we have seen martial law imposed and transition to a peaceful military coup. The community has concerns about what this means for travel to Thailand, safety, etc. This document provides information on the travel advisory of different nations, an overview of the domestic situation, and what the Organization Committee has done to assure the complete well-being and safety of the participants.

After reviewing different travel advisories, we note there isn't any nation that has given travelers to Thailand the highest level warning which is **"against all traveling"** i.e. not recommending people to travel to that nation.

Currently many nations ask travelers to **exercise a high degree of caution (level 2)**, in a total score of 4 (Exercise normal safety precaution (level 1) ---- do not travel (level 4)) with additional recommendations:

1. Register yourself with the embassy
2. Keep close update on the local political situation
3. Avoid all protest locations, large gathering
4. Avoid central Bangkok (where most protest are in)

Can the participants and organization committee follow these travel recommendations? I do believe "YES", we can contact the embassy and register you with them and keep them in the loop on where we are on a daily basis. We committed before that we aren't going near protest locations and large gatherings, and this is why the Organization Committee has moved most of its venues outside Bangkok and previous protest hotspots. We moved the tournament to Assumption University and the Hotel to be outside Bangkok, currently the fact is that the University, Hotel, Airport and most partner schools aren't in Bangkok anymore. **The event is 70% in Samut Prakan which is a separate province next to Bangkok.** The rest are in other province nearby to Samut Prakan, for example Chonburi.



The red dotted line, indicate the province, the big square is the airport which is in Samut Prakan, also the campus is in the same province; NOT BANGKOK.

Organization committee flexibility in changing the hotel, venue, etc is to assure that we follow the travel recommendation and assure the safety of all participants. We will continue to make sure no participants are placed anywhere near the area of protests. As the host, the participants' well being and safety are the core issues, and our main priority.

Domestic political situation and updates

Since 1932, Thailand has witnessed a total of 11 successful coups and 7 abortive attempts. We are now recognized as the nation with the highest numbers of coups. I have witnessed two in my lifetime in Thailand, in 2006 and 2014. Military coups may seem scary from a global perspective, but I can speak from personal experience that the 2006 and 2014 military coups were so different. They were entirely peaceful, where citizens presented flowers to army personnel, thanking them for their help in political reform. The latest military coup was also peaceful. Bangkok citizens feel more secure because the weapons are now on the right side (military and police).

Thais live their normal lives daily. There are some businesses (ie. night clubs, bars) which need to adjust their business hours base on the curfew which is at 1AM to 4AM (only 3 hours). Food and consumer goods prices haven't increased, businesses seem more satisfied for the military coup base on the Thai Chamber of Commercial (TCC) survey.

I think that each individual would need to look at military coup in the context in Thailand, where can be compared to 2006. I have collected some statements and articles below to show you how other organizations and the foreign press consider the situation.





Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) official statement of Thailand situation

TCEB, the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, is a public organization established by Royal Decree published in the Royal Gazette on 28th September 2002, and we are tasked with promoting and developing business events in Thailand.

TCEB office: +66 (0) 2694 6000, TCEB call center at 1105 (within Thailand only), visit www.tceb.or.th or contact info@tceb.or.th.

Thailand is now experiencing rapid changes in political developments, being under administration of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) as of 22 May, 2014.

The kingdom has seen the **NCPO took swift actions in several areas including the approval for payments to be made immediately to rice farmers who have waited for so long for money for grain they sold to the previous government under rice-pledging scheme.** (Which former acting government had no power to move forward on the issue, due to their authority is limited)

The National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) has announced the change in curfew from 22.00-05.000 to 00.01-04.00 hours with effective from 28 May, 2014. (which has changed already, even so their is a curfew police officers, military isn't reinforcing it and it is only 3 - 4 hours - from personal experience)

Following the coup, businesses, including banks, petrol and gas stations, hotels, spas, restaurants, entertainment venues, cinemas, convention centers, shopping malls, superstores and convenient stores are adjusting their operating hours to comply with the situation. The BTS Skytrain and MRT Subway systems in Bangkok are now operating until 23.00 hours while inter-provincial passenger bus services will not be operating during curfew. **Hospitals are open and operating as per normal. However, telephone – landline and mobile – and Internet services continue to be available 24/7 as per normal.** (We still have cable television shows, internet (facebook, google+) are all active and normal) - Thai channels have been censored on what news that post to the general public as threatening to national peace and security or not; but all foreign channels ie. CNN, BBC, HBO, FOX can still be accessed as normal.

All airports in Thailand remain open, and air passengers with arrival and departure flights scheduled during the situation can travel to and from the airports at any time as usual. However, Business travelers with arrival and departure flights are advised to prepare all travel documents when traveling to and from the airports.



Thailand's ruling military council has announced it is lifting a night-time curfew in three popular tourist areas.

Published: 2 Jun 2014 at 19:40

The nationwide curfew was imposed after the army seized power on 22 May and runs from midnight to 0400. (The curfew based on the most recent official announcement is 1AM to 4AM, which is only 3 hours each day)

The council said the curfew had been lifted in the resorts of Pattaya, Phuket and Koh Samui. It remains in force in the rest of the country. (Only in power not more than a month, they have removed curfews in some areas already)

After it seized power, the army detained senior politicians for days, saying stability had to be restored.

Small demonstrations against the coup have taken place almost daily in Bangkok, despite the heavy military presence in the city. (There have been multiple locations of small demonstrations and part-time meaning that the protesters leave after demonstrating)

Last week army chief Gen Prayuth Chan-ocha announced that elections would not be held for more than a year, to allow time for political reconciliation and reform. (This is a clear direction that within this year they won't be an election, where political protest, protest with different ideologies (Red shirt, Suthep group, etc) clashes will not accrue because of the elections)

But Thailand's economy remains a concern. Senior military officials have said that the priorities of the ruling council include restoring the confidence of investors and maintaining fiscal discipline.

Air Chief Marshal Prajin Juntong also laid out the junta's economic places late last Sunday, with a list of long-term priorities and spending plans.



Asean will not intervene into Thailand's internal affairs

Published: June 3, 2014 5:55 pm

Myanmar, the Asean chair understood Thailand's political situation and has agreed to explain them to other Asean member states, assuring that they would not intervene in the internal affairs of Thailand.

Sihesak Phuangkitkeow, permanent secretary for foreign affairs, met Myanmar's Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin in Yangon on Monday to explain the three-stage roadmap to improve democracy in Thailand outlined by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) following the coup on May 22.

Sihesak said that the Myanmar Foreign Affairs Minister, as Asean chair, understands political situations in Thailand and would help clarify the plan for reform and steps to return to normalcy of the NCPO.

The ten-member grouping has no concerns about Thailand and is sending its moral support to the reconciliation and democratic process in the country, the Myanmar minister said.

Sihesak quoted the minister as saying that it is confident of Thailand's ability to support the development of Asean.

Sihesak also ordered Thai ambassadors and consuls to explain the situation in Thailand to overseas governments and the private sector to boost confidence in the NCPO's plan to restore peace and order in Thailand.



The Thai Coup Isn't Likely to Ruin Your Vacation (Just the Economy)

Published: 23 May 2014

Soldiers armed with automatic weapons are in the streets, a nationwide curfew installed and news broadcasts censored, so is Thailand still safe for the millions of tourists planning to visit?

The scenes were all too familiar in the world's most coup-prone country on Thursday. Military vehicles fanned out across Bangkok, as generals spoke forcefully on national broadcasts about the need for order after months of political unrest. But like the majority of the 11 other coups in Thailand's modern era, Thursday's affair remained bloodless.

For tourists hoping to lap up the country's renowned cuisine and relax at its idyllic beaches during the upcoming months, travel experts say it's unlikely they'll be directly affected by the country's latest putsch. However, the industry on the whole might not be so lucky.

As of Friday morning, airports remained opened and life in Bangkok kicked off to its perennial chaotic start.

"It's business as usual," Suparek Soorangura, of the Association of Thai Travel Agents, tells TIME. "Coups usually come in a peaceful way and don't have much of an effect on the normal way of life."

The largest hindrance to both Thais and foreigners remains a nationwide curfew, from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m., implemented by the country's new military rulers yesterday evening. However, authorities have granted special dispensation to those traveling to and from the nation's airports during that time. (This have already changed to 1am to 4am (3 hours))

"[The] curfew is nationwide, but in some of the more remote areas of Thailand, and on the beaches, it hasn't been very strict," says Richard Barrow, a popular travel blogger in the country, via email. "[It] may last less than a week if there isn't any unrest."

Following the announcement of the coup, the U.S. embassy in Bangkok issued a statement advising American citizens to "avoid areas where there are protest events, large gatherings, or security operations and follow the instructions of Thai authorities." But officials stopped short of calling on Americans to exit the country.

"We're not, at this time, advising American citizens to depart," U.S. State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters during a press conference in Washington on Thursday.



During a televised address to the nation on Thursday, the general at the helm of the country's newly formed military junta promised to keep foreigners in Thailand safe.

"For the ambassadors, consulate and international organizations, including foreigners living in the Kingdom of Thailand, the peace-maintaining committee will protect you," said ruling General Prayuth Chan-ocha, according to the New York Times.

Unless the Red Shirts strike back at the junta — and that remains a distinct possibility — *Thailand could even be safer now than it was in the past six months of mass protests by pro- and antigovernment demonstrators in the capital, during which 28 people were killed and more than 700 injured. The protest sites have been cleared and thousands of demonstrators sent home — for now at least.*

"At the moment, everything is open as normal," says Barrow. *"With the protesters off the streets of Bangkok, the city is actually safer than it was before."*

Regardless of the realities on the ground, Thailand's latest spell of military rule will likely put an increasingly large dent in one of the economy's most important engines.

The kingdom's tourism sector last year raked in an estimated \$35 billion — accounting for approximately 9% of economic output. But in 2014, an estimated 400,000 fewer people traveled to Thailand during the first four months of the year.

Earlier this month, the Tourism Council of Thailand cut its foreign-tourist arrivals target for 2014 to 26.3 million from 28 million — the lowest such figure in half a decade, according to Reuters.

On Monday, the country's National Economic and Social Development Board reported that the Thai economy contracted by 2.1% during the first quarter, when compared with the previous three months.

So while there's still plenty to grin about in the Land of Smiles, there are more reasons to frown as well.



* The blue is my personal additional comments, orange is highlighted from the general announcement

Censorship issues

There have been a concern on the effects of the censorship issue in Thailand which may effect the debating tournament on 2 levels, 1. Motions which WSDC guarantee that any kind of motions should be open to debate in the tournament and 2. The safety of the participants, which is debating will not lead anyone to be detained, arrested, prosecuted.

Referring to the news from Bangkok Post, 2 June 2014; “[The NCPO] must look at their intention, what they want to communicate and surrounding circumstances,” Col Winthai said.

Military officers usually used compromise and negotiation with the protesters, said Col Winthai,

As stated from Col Winthai, we don't have any intention to disrupt Thailand peace and security. Our purpose is to educate and compete in an academic sport where debates are hosted in closed venues. The debates would be hosted in academic institutions in a closed environment which means that they would debate in rooms and not among the general public. Debates would be in English which isn't the mother tongue of the nation. So the intent would be considered educational, not as political protest.

EU-Thailand National Debating Championship our National championship which has been sponsored by the European Union Commission for the past 6 years was just hosted and run successfully in the period of martial law and military coup outside Bangkok.

Sample motion that was used in EU-Thailand 2014;

Theme: Thailand

This house supports subsidies for the Thai rice farmers

This house celebrates posts by celebrities on social media that express their political view

This house would legalise and regulate the adult entertainment industry

These motions are current political issues involving different positions among protest groups and the military leadership and caused no problems. From this, we are confident that the debaters will not need to be restricted in what motions, arguments, or examples they use during the WSDC.

As I stated above, we still have cable television shows, internet (facebook, google+) are all active and normal) - Thai channels have been censored on what news that post to the general public as threatening to national peace and security or not; but all foreign channels i.e. HBO, FOX, CNN, BBC can still be access as normal.





Bupa Health Insurance would be provided to the participants

Bupa background:

Established in the UK in 1947, Bupa is now a leading international healthcare group. We offer personal and company health insurance, run care homes for older people and hospitals, and provide workplace health services, health assessments and chronic disease management services, including health coaching, and home healthcare.

Employing nearly 52,000 people, Bupa has operations around the world, principally in the UK, Australia, Spain, New Zealand and the USA, as well as Hong Kong, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, India, China and across Latin America.

With no shareholders, we invest our profits to provide more and better healthcare. We are committed to making quality, patient-centred, affordable healthcare more accessible in the areas of wellness, chronic disease management and ageing.

Bupa Thailand

We have been established for over thirty years. Formerly known as Blue Cross Health Insurance, Bupa is the leading health insurance specialist in Thailand

We now have over 200,000 members and more than 2,000 organizations. With our local knowledge and Bupa's world-wide presence, we ensure that our members have access to some of the best ideas and innovations in the world as well as global health care expertise.

To make quality healthcare accessible, we guarantee lifetime renewal (as per Bupa policy) , enable cashless treatment with our medical card and have the medical network more than 300 in Thailand.

BENEFIT	Silver Plus
Medical & Other Expenses	1,000,000
Personal Accident	500,000
Room & Board Including Nursing Service Per Day	8,000

Personal message

I totally understand and respect all the concerns which participants have with Thailand's situation, but if I wasn't sure that I can assure your delegation safety, I would consider the cancelation of the tournament myself but from TCEB, Assumption University and the Foundation we all still believe reality that we can still run a good and safe tournament.

I been involve in debate training, developing, hosting for 15 years now, I have the opportunity to host is so many tournament under difficult situation such as **United Asia Debating Championship (UADC) when the red shirt closed down Bangkok, which tournament was organization at the campus and participants were still able to enjoy their trip to Thailand.**

I feel that all young debaters are like my own sister and brother, this is my family and I wouldn't want anything bad to happen to them.

I would like to thank so many people which has emailed me with their encouragement, support, guidance I sincerely think that any organizer would feel tired with dealing with all which are external factors.

I can only provide you the facts of the matter which ask for your consideration, we have moved deadlines for registration, payments, anything to make is easier for participants. For the final registration phase, we would consider to move them out a bit more so that the national teams can make their decision to participants and also finalize payment.



Reference: Governments Travel Advice

NOTE: On a scale of 1-4 (1. Exercise normal safety precautions, 2. Exercise a high degree of caution, 3. Reconsider your need to travel, 4. Do not travel), many nations have placed Thailand at Level 2, with a few placing it at Level 3. None have placed it at Level 4. Here is a survey of some travel advisories issued by governments.



Canada

Exercise a high degree of caution

There is no nationwide advisory in effect for Thailand. However, **you should exercise a high degree of caution** due to ongoing political tensions and sporadic demonstrations in Bangkok and elsewhere in the country. A military coup took place on May 22, 2014, and martial law is in effect.

There is a risk of civil unrest, sporadic violence, and attacks throughout the country. Widespread flooding regularly occurs, and can leave travelers stranded for extended periods of time.



United States

The U.S. Department of State **recommends that U.S. citizens reconsider any non-essential travel to Thailand**, particularly Bangkok, due to ongoing political and social unrest and restrictions on internal movements, including an indefinite nighttime curfew throughout Thailand. The Department of State has advised official U.S. government travelers to defer all non-essential travel to Thailand until further notice. This Travel Alert supersedes the Travel Alert issued on May 23, 2014, and will expire on August 21, 2014.



Australia

Summary	Entry and exit	Safety and security	Local travel	Laws	Health	Where to Get Help	Additional information
Thailand overall							
Exercise normal safety precautions	Exercise a high degree of caution	Reconsider your need to travel	Do not travel				
Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Songkhla							
Exercise normal safety precautions	Exercise a high degree of caution	Reconsider your need to travel	Do not travel				



Singapore

Singaporeans **should seriously reconsider visiting Thailand** at the moment. The situation is unpredictable and volatile, and may evolve quite rapidly. Singaporeans in Thailand should monitor local news and developments closely and follow the instructions of local authorities. New instructions could be announced at short notice. There have been several protests against the military in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. More protests may take place in Bangkok and other cities. These protests could turn confrontational and escalate into violence. Singaporeans should avoid large gatherings, as well as all protests and their vicinity. Singaporeans who are travelling to Thailand should exercise a high degree of caution and take all necessary precautions for personal safety, including purchasing comprehensive travel and medical insurance.



United Kingdom





New Zealand

There is **some risk to your security** elsewhere in Thailand due to the threat from terrorism and potential for violent civil unrest and we advise caution.

Political Tension/Civil unrest On 22 May 2014, the Royal Thai Army announced the military had taken control of the government. Martial law is in place across Thailand and gives the military certain expanded powers to enforce law and order. There is an increased military presence in Bangkok and the surrounding provinces. **The Chief of the Royal Thai Army has assured the safety of all foreigners in Thailand.**



Ireland

If you're planning a trip to Thailand, **we advise you to exercise extreme caution.**

Irish citizens in Thailand should exercise extreme caution, monitor developments via media and social media, and follow the instructions of the authorities. **Irish citizens should take extra care to care to avoid any demonstrations, protests or security operations.** There have been some demonstrations against the army's actions and there is a risk these could turn violent. Stay alert to the situation, and if you feel your safety is at risk, stay in your accommodation.