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Thailand tightens immigration rules: Shorter visa-free stays, fewer eligible countries, and a new deportation framework.



I. Introduction

After introducing expanded visa-free access to support tourism, Thailand is now reversing this policy by reinstating stricter immigration measures. Previously, nationals of many countries and territories could enter Thailand without a visa for stays of up to 60 days. While this policy promoted tourism and commercial activity, it also raised concerns among Thai authorities about potential abuse of visa exemption, unauthorized employment, and illegal overstaying.

Consequently, on 14 July 2026, the Thai Cabinet approved two immigration measures, reducing the visa-free stay period for eligible countries and territories and establishing a new framework to facilitate the expedited removal of foreign nationals found to be in violation of certain Thai laws.

II. Visa-free regime update

The updated framework will reduce the standard visa-free stay period **from 60 to 30 days**. The revised scheme will apply to nationals of **59 countries** and territories, compared with 93 under the previous visa exemption regime.

One notable feature of the reform is the introduction of more consistent treatment for certain nationalities. In particular, the new rules aim to grant **all 27 EU member states** the same 30-day visa-free privileges. The Thai government expects this change to strengthen international relations, support negotiations for Schengen visa exemptions for Thai nationals, and facilitate bilateral economic agreements.

The Seychelles and Mauritius are set to receive 15-day visa-free entry. Additionally, citizens of Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Serbia will be eligible for a visa-on-arrival scheme.

III. India to retain visa-free status

The revised framework adopts a more moderate approach towards India. Instead of returning Indian nationals to the visa-on-arrival regime, as was proposed earlier in an effort to strengthen Thailand's immigration framework, India will retain its visa-free status. Indian nationals will therefore continue to be eligible to enter Thailand without obtaining a visa in advance. However, the permitted visa-free stay will be reduced from 60 to 30 days.

This adjustment follows a reported 20% decline in Indian arrivals to Thailand after the proposed return of Indian nationals to the visa-on-arrival regime was first announced in May this year, although the measure had not yet come into force.

IV. Thailand introduces a formal deportation framework

Alongside the aforementioned changes to the visa exemption regime, the Thai Cabinet has approved the country's first formal administrative framework for the deportation of foreign nationals. The draft Prime Minister's Office Regulation on deportation aims to standardize and expedite the process of removing foreign nationals who have violated immigration, employment, business, or criminal laws. Previously, Thailand lacked a unified administrative regulation governing deportation procedures. This often resulted in removal cases requiring extensive, case-by-case coordination between multiple agencies, which could cause delays.

The new regulation identifies six categories of conduct that may justify deportation when removal is deemed necessary to protect public order and morality:

- Illegal entry into or unlawful stay in Thailand;
- Illegal employment in violation of foreign employment laws;
- Unlawful business operations under the Foreign Business Act;
- Forging or using forged official documents;
- Committing a criminal offense punishable by three or more years of imprisonment; and
- Acting as a principal offender, organizer, instigator, supporter, or accomplice in relation to any of the above offenses.

The new deportation framework is part of Thailand's wider shift towards stricter immigration enforcement. Although it does not impact lawful tourism activities, the risk of enforcement action is higher for foreign nationals who overstay their visas, work without the necessary authorization, in particular a proper visa and work permit, conduct business without the required

approvals, use false documentation, or engage in activities that are inconsistent with their immigration status.

V. Entry into force

The outlined changes will not take effect immediately following Cabinet approval. Instead, the revised rules will come into force 15 days after they are published in the Royal Gazette. Until then, the current entry conditions will remain in effect. Foreign nationals who entered Thailand before the effective date will be permitted to remain in the country for the duration of their originally authorised stay.

VI. Our services

Should you have any questions regarding the new system, please do not hesitate to contact us by email at thailand@luther-services.com or by telephone at +66 2210 0036.

We are also happy to assist with corporate compliance matters, including accounting, payroll, company secretarial services, and tax compliance, as well as general legal and tax advice.

VII. Your contacts



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