

Renewing Your Passport in Thailand

By Catherine Tucker

Going to Bangkok to renew your passport is not the daunting task it may seem to be; but in fact, one that is quick, simple, and can be really fun! In order for this to happen, there are a few

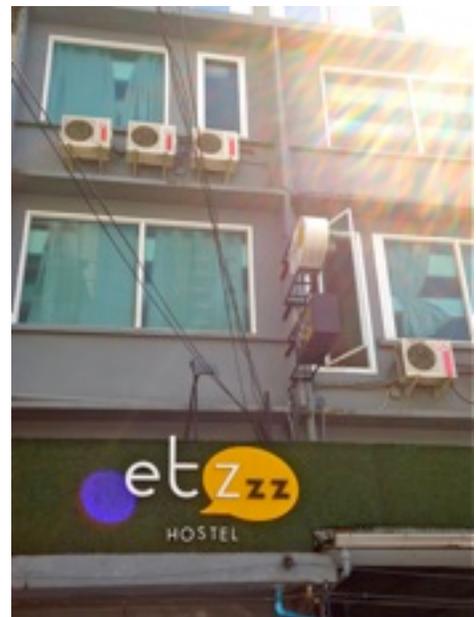


things you need to remember when going to the embassy, and allow yourself some time to explore the city. It's a wonderful place. The one downside to the trip is the expense, but there are always thrifty ways of doing things.

I decided to go to Bangkok when I had a 5 day weekend. Thus, I bought a train ticket from the Phantom station on Talad Mai right by a Tops Express market. My ticket cost me about 760 baht for an air-conditioned sleeper train that left at midnight (I took the midnight train to Bangkok). Leaving Friday night, I awoke Saturday morning to the sounds of people stirring, beds being converted into seats, and Thais walking up and down the halls selling breakfast. Because I slept a little bit longer, I missed these locals selling their wares on the train, but was able to order breakfast from the train. Once again, I waited too long for

this as well and they were out of my first choice, but was able to still get something hearty. Food on the sleeper trains is expensive. I have a feeling the food the locals were selling was probably cheaper, but I didn't get a chance to find out.

We arrived in Bangkok (late, as most trains as) around 11:30am. I got off at the Hua Lampung train station, which is the last one on the line. Instead of getting off on an earlier stop, I chose this one as I was advised it was easiest to get to my hostel from there. I chose my hostel according to its vicinity to the American Embassy. My hostel's name was the ETZzz Hostel on Soi Ngam Du Phil, which was not only walking distance to the embassy, but also to the Lumpini metro station, which is on Thanon Rama IV.



The ETZzz Hostel was a very nice place to stay. It's not a Khaoson Rd. so it's away from the craziness of all the backpackers, bars, and people trying to sell you all kinds of goods. ETZzz is in the Sathorn part of Bangkok, which is the business district and is very close to the Siam district. This is the newer part of Bangkok that is very much a city with tall buildings, modern shopping, and access to the Metro and the Skytrain. When you go over to Old Bangkok you will not see these things. Very close to the hostel is Lumpini Park, which is a great place to walk around and see the high rises of the city on the edges of the park. If you are up to exercising when you are there, this is a good place to go for a run or even bring a yoga mat to put under one of the many pavilions that are scattered throughout the park. I didn't do either of

those things when I was there, but wish I had brought the equipment needed to do so. Instead, I sat under a pavilion facing a pond and read a book.

If you are looking for something to eat in the neighborhood of the ETZzz Hostel, there are many food carts when you go out of the hostel and take 2 rights. They are mostly there in the morning and afternoon and in the evening there are a couple of reasonably priced restaurants in the same



area. There is also a walkway that goes over the ridiculously busy street where you can find more street food. If you walk out of the hostel, go right, and then left on Thanon Rama IV and continue walking, you will pass some nice hotels for a more expensive meal, or if you keep walking, there is a shopping center whose bottom floor is full of restaurants and even houses a Starbucks. I found this place to be somewhat expensive, but did enjoy a latte and muffin when there.

The day I went to get my passport renewed I also had a Mexican food mission in my mind. Not having had Mexican food for over 3 months, I decided this was going to be one of the top items on my Bangkok to do list. So, the night before my embassy trip I googled Mexican restaurants and found one close to the embassy. Score! I went to sleep that night with dreams of burritos in my head. The next morning was when I needed to go to the embassy. Back in Surat, I made an appointment online using this website: <http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/passports.html>, for 10:45am on Monday, which was the last available appointment time. I wanted a later time in case I got lost or something else happened along the way.

I woke up way before my appointment, around 8am, got ready, ate some breakfast, and headed out. Walking to the embassy was a far easier task than what it seemed to be from the directions I got from google maps. To get there, you go out of the hostel and take 2 rights as if you're going to the food carts. Walk over the foot bridge and go left on the other side. Keep walking straight on Thanon Rama IV until you get to Wireless Rd. where you will take a right. There is a bridge at this intersection and Lumpini Park will be across the street. You will keep walking past where the park ends. On the way, there is a copy shop where you can make copies of you ID and/or have passport photos made if need be. When I got to the embassy, it didn't really seem as though I needed the copy of my ID; plus, the embassy made copies of my passport and visa for me so I think they would make a copy of your ID if that was the case.



After the park ends, there will be a traffic light. Keep going. You will be on the right hand side of the road where you will pass the Japanese embassy and will eventually come upon a wall with murals painted on them for Thailand and America and how they work together. There are a few different scenes, which were painted by different schools. Keep walking past this and the embassy will be right there on the right. After you walk up a few stairs, you check in outside, and then again inside where you will give the security officer all of your electronic items and your ID. Next, you will get the metal detector wand waved over you to make sure you're okay to enter the building. After this happens you will go out of the back door, which leads you outside where you will take a left heading down a few steps into an open air room. On the left you will see a red box looking area that is the post office where you will buy your self-addressed envelope for 75baht. But, before you purchase the envelope, you must go to the right, up the ramp to the passport and other services office.



When you go through the door, you will enter an indoor area where you will check in for your appointment. I printed my forms off the internet from the same website I used to make the appointment. Handing these to the person working, he noticed I had the form for a minor (whoops), so he gave me a new form to fill out. Doing this makes me think you can get the forms when you get there in case you forget or anything happens. It is at this same window where you need to ask for the form for your

self-addressed envelope. After you check in, you go through another open door on the left to pay the \$110 it costs to renew your passport. Then comes the waiting. It was during this wait time that I took my form to the red box post office area to get my self-addressed envelope. When I came back, I waited for about 30 seconds before they called my name. I walked back up to the window, had a copy made of my passport and visa, and was told it will take 2 weeks to process my new passport. I was also told they will send my old one back with my new one. The whole passport renewal process took maybe half an hour. I'm not sure if it's because I was so early for my appointment, or because of what time I was there in general, but getting my passport renewed was not time consuming at all.

After my appointment, I decided to check out Lumpini Park before going on my Mexican food mission because my time at the embassy was so short and I wasn't hungry yet. Spending about 45 minutes in the park, walking around and reading, I felt as though it was time to go eat. I headed out of the park back towards the embassy and headed to La Monita Taqueria in the Mahatun Plaza. To get there, cross the street to get back on the side of the road the embassy is on and walk away from Thanon Rama IV. You should be on Wireless Rd. You will pass a market on the street that is full of food carts and people. Afterwards, there will be many buildings on the right that look new and modern, many of them housing multiple different



things. When you see a big intersection in front of you (Wireless Rd. and Thanon Sukhumvit), you will want to take a right in to that plaza before it. Continue on until you see a sign for Mahatun Plaza and take a right. La Monita Taqueria will be on the left. I ordered a wet burrito because that's one of my favorites, and it was absolutely delicious and filled the craving I was having. The one downside to this place is the price, but if you love Mexican food as much as I do, it's well worth the money.

Later that night I headed over to the Sukhumvit area of Bangkok because I wanted to see a movie that was playing in 3D, which I advise doing as it was about 100baht cheaper than in Surat. The



Sukhumvit area is accessible by Skytrain and is a great area with tons of restaurants, bars, and shopping areas. This is the home of Soi Cowboy, a street known for its lights and ladies. I stumbled upon this street after dinner and a beer and it definitely lived up to its name. After walking through the lit up street of Cowboy, I kept walking towards the movie theater in search of a bar called Brew I had read about online. This place has over 100 varieties of beers and ciders and I knew I had to go there before coming back to Surat. The beer selection in Surat is not the best. It's located on Thonglor and Soi 13 and you can get there by getting off on the Khlong Tan Skytrain stop, and taking a left on Thonglor. Walking for about 10minutes or so, take a left onto Soi 13. Brew is located in "Seen Space" on the left hand side of the road that houses other restaurants as well. It is in the back right of the space. The beer selection here is unreal, having

more beers than some American bars, but the price is unreal as well. Missing my Oregon beer, I paid quite the hefty price to drink one, but it's all up to you what price you would pay for a good beer from home.

The rest of my time in Bangkok was spent seeing as many sites as I could afford. With Lonely Planet and www.bangkok.com as my guide, I set off on some wonderful adventures. The first thing I did when I got there was head to the Siam district of Bangkok in order to see the Jim Thompson house and go to the Arts and Cultural Museum. As a lover of the arts, these were two places that I highly enjoyed. Jim Thompson was an American man who moved to Thailand and helped their silks become very popular and famous. His house is made from about 6 or 7 wooden houses put together to make one large house that holds a beautiful collection of Thai art, which is the reason I went. It was 100baht for a guided tour in English. The Art and Culture museum is walking distance from here and is free. After about 3 of 4 floors of mostly stores, the exhibits start and are pretty amazing. I'm not sure if they have any regular exhibits, but the ones I saw were a mix of mixed media, time-based media, paintings, photography, and more. It was great to see Thai culture and art in these exhibits and at the Jim Thompson house.



My second day there was Sunday so I headed to the Chatuchak weekend market, which consists of a maze of indoor and outdoor stalls selling almost anything you can imagine. This is a great place to find souvenirs, gifts, clothing, and something good to eat. After spending about an hour or two there I had to leave because I was spending so much money on all the great wares! Getting there and back is simple as you can access it by the Metro. Just get off on the Chatuchak Park stop and follow the signs. After this shopping experience, I headed into Old Bangkok, which was more difficult to get to because the trains don't go there. So, I got off on the last stop at the Hua Lampung train station and caught a tuk-tuk down to the



amulet market. I was able to talk the tuk-tuk driver down to around 200baht for the ride.



The amulet market is as what the names says, an outdoor street market with tables full of the amulets Thai people wear for good luck. There are other goods here as well, but mostly all the stalls are covered with amulets. Once again, this is a place

for some good street food and at the end of the market there is a nice park by the river where you can enjoy your food purchase. Walking past the park, you will come up upon Wat

Pho, which houses the giant, golden, lying down Buddha. I definitely recommend going here as it is one spectacularly beautiful temple to behold. The cost to go in is about 100-150baht. In the same area you can visit the grand palace, which is 500baht for a tour so I didn't go, but there is also a fabric museum which is only 150baht. If you go back to the park by the amulet market, you can catch a free boat taxi to either go across the river (which I never did) or go down the river to the stop of your choosing. I decided to get off at China town and have a look. In China town there were many markets and



food vendors, but I got somewhat lost here, so I don't think I saw the good part of China town. Oh well, maybe next time.

One of my favorite places I went to in Bangkok was the Erawan Museum, which displays a giant 3-headed elephant Erawan statue on top of an ornate pink building. When you go inside, it's so magnificently decorated that you will walk around in awe. It's difficult to describe the beauty of this place, so I definitely suggest actually taking a trip here. You are also able to climb the stairs to the belly of the elephant where you will find a wondrous space filled with beauty. The surrounding gardens are just as lovely and full of more beautifully decorated statues. The one downside of this place is that it is far away and difficult to find transportation there and back. My taxi there was around 220baht, and the one back was around 125baht. However, it was at this place where I learned about "expat pricing." If you ask, sometimes you can get cheaper prices because you live in Thailand. All I had to do was show them the copy of my visa I had made at them embassy and my admission price was cut in half. Not too shabby.



Finally, the very last thing I did in Bangkok was go to Khaosan Rd., the backpackers' district. Not a very long stretch of road, Khaosan is home to many hostels and bars and is full of backpackers either just arriving or about to leave Thailand. It's a good place for meeting new people, buying cheap clothes, and getting nice and drunk. This kind of place, to me, is good for one night, but too much can be overwhelming. It stays loud until the wee hours of the morning, as does the debauchery. This is why I chose to stay in a different area of town, but my night here was fun and I'm glad I went.

Going back to Surat was easy enough. I bought my train ticket the day I arrived at the Hua Lumping train station for around 550baht for an air conditioned seat. I left in the morning and arrived around dinner time. The train on the way back had a free snack, tea and coffee, and a free lunch. Granted the train was an hour late getting to Bangkok and dropped me off about two and a half hours later than it was supposed to arrive, but it got me there safely and with no other complaints. If you get to Surat before 6:30pm, there is an orange city bus that can take you into town, I believe you can get dropped off by Phantom, where you buy tickets. Unfortunately, because my train was late I had to take a tuk-tuk. Don't forget to pull the teacher card with these guys. Just tell them, "bpen kru" and a lot of the time they will give you a better deal. Whereas some tourists from the train paid 150baht (which isn't that bad) to go into town, I paid 125baht. Overall a very successful, fun, and easy trip!