



Expats Counsel



ON THE ROAD, PART 1: Getting a driving-licence

Despite its metaphorical charm, there is a practical angle to taking to the road on the driver's side in Thailand. Of course, driving in a foreign country, however civilised and developed the country, may not be for you. No matter how careful you are, you will always be presented with that cross-cultural experience that may not be positive — the aggressive other driver in the SUV, the fender-bender where the guy at fault speeds away, the motorbike turning into traffic on the wrong side of the road, and so on. So first, you should decide: Is independence from having to wait for and pay tuk-tuk drivers and taxis worth enough to put up with the potential liabilities? If so, you need to know a few things, so read on.

Everybody needs a licence to drive in Thailand. An international licence works, but some insurance companies condition coverage on the driver having a Thai licence, so you should check this. To get a Thai licence you have to be at least 18 and present in Thailand on a visa other than a tourist visa, or the 30-day tourist stay issued at Thai airports.

To apply for a driving-licence you have to go to the Department of Land Transport

in Bangkok or a provincial branch with the following documents:

1. Medical certificate, available from practically any street clinic in Thailand. This must be less than 30 days old. Be sure when you go for this to take your passport, because they may not issue it without some form of identification.

2. Passport with signed photocopies of the photo page, the visa page and the most recent entry stamp page.

3. Photocopy of your international driving-licence, signed by you. If you have this you do not have to take the written or driving tests mentioned below. In case the international licence is not in Thai or in English, you must have your country's embassy or consulate translate it into English or issue a certification that you have such a licence.

4. Two colour photos (3 by 4cm), direct face, no hat nor dark glasses, not more than six months old.

5. Residence permit or work permit, or, if you don't have one, a letter issued not more than one year previously by the Thai Immigration Department or your country's embassy or consulate showing your address in Thailand.

If you don't speak or write Thai you should bring an interpreter with you to help you fill out the application form and take the tests. There are five of them — a written test, a driving test, a depth perception test, a colour test and a reflex test. As mentioned above, if you have an international licence you can avoid taking the written test and the driving test. After passing these and paying a small fee you will receive a temporary licence valid for one year.

A year after you have received the temporary licence you can apply for a licence valid for five years. You must do this within one year of the expiration of the temporary licence or you will have to retake the above tests. At that time you must bring with you the residence or work permit or other proof of address, two new pictures and a new medical certificate, the same as discussed above. You must also bring the temporary licence and your passport. ■

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Our battered suitcases were piled on the sidewalk again; we had longer ways to go. But no matter, the road is life

JACK KEROUAC