Thailand with kids, minus the overwhelm

The three decisions that actually shape the trip: where to base, when to go, and what to sort before you land.

A quick word on where this comes from. This isn't one family's opinion from one trip. It's the pattern, pulled from hundreds of real family trip reports and the questions around 11,000 mums and dads ask here every week. One family can tell you what worked for them once. This tells you what keeps working, for families like yours.

Before you book, there's one recent change worth knowing, because a lot of guides haven't caught up on it yet.

ENTRY RULES · 2026

The visa-free stay changed. From 15 September 2026, Thailand cut the visa-free stay for UK and Australian passport holders from 60 days to 30. For a normal two or three week family holiday this changes nothing, you're well inside 30 days, and if you ever needed longer you can apply once to extend by up to 30 more.

I'll still say the honest thing: this is a legal rule and rules can shift, so before you book take thirty seconds to check the official source for your passport, gov.uk (FCDO) for the UK or smartraveller.gov.au for Australia.

There was never a shortage of information out there. Search "Thailand with kids" and you'll drown in it. What actually keeps parents up at night is the fear underneath it. Will the kids get sick. Are you going to pick the wrong island and waste the one big holiday you've saved all year for. Will you land at midnight with a tired four-year-old and no idea where your transfer is.

Get the three big decisions right and the rest tends to sort itself out. Let's go.

DECISION 01

Where to base yourselves

The first fork in the road: **Bangkok first, or islands first?** What comes up again and again is that Bangkok is brilliant but draining with little ones. The pattern that keeps working is two to three nights in Bangkok, front-loaded while everyone's still running on adrenaline, then fly south to the beach and actually rest. If your kids are very small or you're tight on time, some families skip Bangkok entirely. That's a completely valid trip.

Then the bigger question, which base in the south. Here's how the four most-discussed ones tend to shake out.

Krabi

AGES 6+ · CALMER & CHEAPER

Greener, more laid-back, and families consistently say it runs 20 to 30% cheaper than Phuket. Limestone scenery, easy longtail boat trips.

Phuket

ANY AGE · EASIEST

The most developed: family resorts, kids' clubs, hospitals close by, direct flights. Many families skip Patong as a base and pick quieter beaches like Kata or Karon.

Khao Lak

BABIES & TODDLERS

The quiet one, about an hour north of Phuket airport. Long calm beaches, settle into one resort and barely move. Fewer attractions, more real downtime.

Koh Samui

BEST FOR UK SUMMER

Its own airport and a scheduling advantage: it sits on the opposite monsoon cycle to the Andaman coast, so it's a strong pick when your dates fall in the UK summer holidays.

THE QUICK WAY TO DECIDE

- Want it easy, organised, resort-and-kids-club? **Phuket** (a quieter beach, not Patong).
- Want calmer, cheaper, a bit more adventure, older kids? **Krabi**.
- Babies or toddlers, one resort, do-nothing rest? **Khao Lak**.
- Travelling in the UK summer? **Koh Samui**, for the weather.

You don't need to see all four. Pick one base, maybe two. The families who try to "do" three islands in ten days are the ones who come back needing a holiday from the holiday.

DECISION 02

When to go, the two-coast trick

Here's the bit that really changes plans. Thailand's two beach coasts have opposite monsoon seasons, so there's almost always somewhere with good beach weather. You just match the coast to your dates.

GB UK families

October half-term & Christmas: the Andaman coast (Phuket, Krabi, Khao Lak) is coming into or in its best season. Prime time.

Summer (Jul–Aug): the Andaman side is wetter, so steer toward Koh Samui and the Gulf for better beach odds.

Easter: tail end of the Andaman dry season, still lovely.

AU Australian families

December–January: the big summer break lines up with the Andaman coast's best season. Peak for a reason, so book early, this window fills.

Around July: some families go in the greener months for 30 to 40% lower prices and near-empty beaches, taking an afternoon downpour as the trade.

One line to remember: don't pick the island first and hope for weather. Pick the coast that's in season for your dates, then choose the island.

DECISION 03 · PRINT THIS

Sort before you land

The families who do the boring bits before they fly are the ones whose first day doesn't fall apart. Everything here can be sorted from your sofa. Tick as you go.

PRE-FLIGHT CHECKLIST — FAMILY OF ____ · DEPARTURE ____

DOCUMENTS & ENTRY

- [ ] Passports valid at least 6 months beyond travel, with a blank page for the stamp
- [ ] TDAC (Thailand Digital Arrival Card) filed in the 72 hours before you land
  Mandatory, free, five minutes, at tdac.immigration.go.th
- [ ] Checked your visa-free stay on the official source
  30 days for UK/AU from 15 Sep 2026, extendable once by up to 30 more
- [ ] Passport photos/copies on your phone, plus one printed set

CONNECTIVITY

- [ ] Internet working the second you land (an eSIM set up before you fly, see below)
- [ ] Offline maps downloaded and the Grab app installed

MONEY & COVER

- [ ] Travel insurance sorted before you book anything else
  Information, not advice: check it covers your activities, medical care, evacuation, and your kids. Compare a couple, and ask the insurer if in doubt.
- [ ] A card that works abroad, plus some cash for arrival

LANDING SMOOTHLY

- [ ] First-night transfer pre-booked (not the moment to negotiate a taxi)
- [ ] Car-seat plan decided in advance (see Getting around, below)
- [ ] First two nights' accommodation confirmed, address saved offline
- [ ] A small comfort/meds kit packed (built with your GP or pharmacist, not this guide)

The one families wish they'd sorted first: internet on arrival

The single most common "I wish we'd done it first" in the group. You step off the plane, Maps and WhatsApp just work, and you find your transfer without hunting a SIM kiosk while a toddler melts down. The cleanest way families do this now is an eSIM set up before the flight. One plan can cover the trip, and it usually costs less than a couple of airport coffees.

Set up your eSIM before you fly →

The eSIM we point families to is an affiliate link, same price for you. We only share ones we'd actually recommend, and this is a good one. The small thanks helps keep the group and this guide running. 💙

REFERENCE

What a week actually costs

The honest answer is "it depends", so here's a rough calculator instead of one number. Tell it your family and how you like to travel, and it estimates a range. It's an estimate, not a quote, and prices always move. All figures in USD.

TYPICAL COSTS, FOR REFERENCE

Accommodation	from $80 / night
Bangkok 4-star	2,500–4,000 THB
Phuket family resort	4,000–8,000 THB
Street food / local meal	$1–6 a dish
Food, per day	$15–40
Snorkelling trip	$30–80
Getting around, per day	$5–15

Thailand can be as cheap or as comfortable as you make it. A family eating local and staying simple spends a fraction of a family in resorts eating Western, and Krabi stretches the budget noticeably further than Phuket.

REFERENCE · THE BIG FEAR

The health worry, calmly

This is the fear that comes up before every other, especially from British parents. Some families tell us they nearly cancelled over it. So let's talk about it calmly. The honest reframe: the number-one health thing families actually deal with is a mild tummy upset, not something dramatic, and the families who prepare a little worry a lot less.

What families say they actually do

- Stick to bottled or filtered water, including for brushing teeth.
- Ease into street food rather than going all-in on day one, and favour busy stalls with high turnover.
- Pack a small "just in case" kit so a rough night isn't a 2am pharmacy hunt.
- Keep little ones hydrated in the heat, it's easy to underestimate.

NOT MEDICAL ADVICE

This guide gives zero medical advice. Anything to do with vaccines, malaria or dengue risk, a medical kit, or whether a destination suits your child's health is a conversation for the people who are qualified:

- **UK:** TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk) and your GP or a travel clinic.
- **Australia:** Smartraveller (smartraveller.gov.au) and your GP or travel doctor.
- **Everyone:** your travel insurer, before you book.

Book a travel health appointment early. Clinics get busy and some things need lead time.

REFERENCE · QUICK MATCH

Which area suits which age

A rough matcher, drawn from what families consistently report. Every kid's different, so read it as a starting point, not a rule.

KIDS' AGES	TENDS TO SUIT	WHY FAMILIES SAY SO
Babies (0–1)	Khao Lak, quiet Phuket (Kata)	One resort, calm water, minimal moving around
Toddlers (2–3)	Khao Lak, Krabi (Ao Nang)	Pools over sightseeing, short travel days, downtime
3–5	Phuket resorts & kids' clubs	Structure, easy amenities, hospitals near
6–9	Krabi, Phuket	Old enough for boat trips, snorkelling, adventure
10+	Krabi, island-hopping, some Bangkok	Can handle bigger days, temples, longtail trips

If your kids span a range, most families base the plan around the youngest one's pace. That's the tip that saves the trip.

REFERENCE · LOGISTICS

Getting around with kids

Grab (the local rideshare app) is the one families lean on most. Upfront pricing, no haggling, no cash fumbling with kids in tow. Download it before you fly and set up payment at home.

Private transfers for airport runs and long hops. A metered taxi is cheaper, but a pre-booked driver with your name on a sign, after a long-haul flight with kids who are done, is worth every baht.

The car-seat reality, and this one's important. Car seats are not standard in taxis, Grabs or most transfers in Thailand, and this catches a lot of families off guard. Options families use: bring your own compact travel seat, request one when you book a private transfer or a car with a driver (book it in advance, it's rarely there on the day otherwise), or plan around it. Decide this before you land, not at the airport curb.

Domestic flights vs ferries. For longer distances, cheap domestic flights (AirAsia, Nok, Bangkok Airways) usually beat a long land-and-sea slog. Ferries are part of the fun for island-hopping, but with little ones check crossing times and sea conditions. For the youngest kids, a short flight often wins over a long boat.

REFERENCE · THE QUIET WORRY

Picky eaters won't starve

Thailand is one of the easier places for fussy little eaters. Not everything is spicy, and you can always ask for **"mai phet"** (not spicy). Rice and noodles are everywhere, fresh fruit is cheap and everywhere, and Western food is easy to find in the tourist areas for a familiar reset day. A few kid-tested wins:

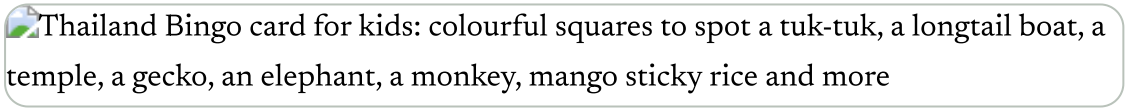
- **Khao pad** (fried rice), the reliable default, with chicken or plain
- **Chicken satay**, skewers with a mild peanut sauce on the side
- **Pad see ew**, wide flat noodles, savoury and not spicy
- **Mango sticky rice**, the one that turns sceptics into fans
- **Fresh fruit smoothies and coconut water**, hydration and a treat in one

THAILAND4FAMILIES · THAILAND BINGO

★ FOR THE FLIGHT & THE TUK-TUK QUEUE

Thailand Bingo, for the kids

Print or screenshot this. The kids tick things off through the trip, and it buys you a surprising amount of quiet on travel days.



This is the printable you'll get, one colourful A4 sheet. Download it below and print one per kid.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO PLAN THIS ALONE

Come talk it through with us

This guide is the distilled version. The real thing is the group: around 11,000 families who've just been where you're going, answering each other's questions every day. Stuck on Krabi vs Phuket for a 3-year-old? Ask. Someone's almost certainly done exactly your trip.

Post your question, share your dates, and tell us what you're most unsure about. We keep it warm, spam-free, and genuinely helpful.

That's the core of it

Three decisions, sorted: where to base yourselves, when to go, and what to lock in before you land. Do those and you've done the hard 80%.

I keep this updated as things change, because visa rules and prices move and I'd rather you had the current version than a pretty out-of-date one. If it helped, the best thanks is passing it to one other family who's nervous about the same things.

THAILAND4FAMILIES · FIELD GUIDE · 2026

Distilled from hundreds of family trip reports and the parents in our group. A couple of links here (the eSIM) are affiliate links, same price for you, and we only point families to ones we'd actually recommend. The small thanks helps keep the group and this guide running. 💙