

Welcome to Thailand!

BGET Volunteer Information Packet

Contact Information

Palang Thai

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TOPS / TBCAF / BGET

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Thailand
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Tops Cell: 09-799-6898

Mailing Address:

c/o TOPS
PO Box 66
Mae Sod, TAK 63110
Thailand

Salinee's Cell: 081-376-2027

Helpful Thai

Bangkok (Kruntep) กรุงเทพมหานคร
Mo Chit Bus Station สถานีขนส่งหมอชิต
Mae Sod แม่สอด
Mae Sod-Mae Tao Road ถนนแม่สอด - แม่ตาว
Chiang Mai เชียงใหม่
Bus Station สถานีขนส่ง
Train Station สถานีรถไฟ
Airport ท่าอากาศยาน (สนามบิน)
Sukhothai สุโขทัย

Quick Reference

Making a pay phone call in Thailand:

- Get a bunch of 1 Bh coins and maybe a 5 Bh coin
- Insert 1Bh into phone
- Dial 1234
- Dial number (ex. 055-542-068)
- Insert 1Bh and 5Bh coins as needed

Quick information for Thailand:

<http://www.tourismthailand.org/about/aboutthailand.aspx>

Currency (11/29/06)

1 USD = 36.0639 THB.
1 UK Pound = 70.3917 THB
1 Euro = 47.5663 THB

Notes: (Ex. Large Leo Beer at 7-11 approx 39 Bh)



TAK (ตาก) PROVINCE

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tak_Province)

Capital Tak

Area 16,406.6 km² (Ranked 4th)

Inhabitants 486,146 (2000) (Ranked 49th)

Pop. Density 30 inh./km² (Ranked 75th)

ISO 3166-2 TH-63

Governor Amonphan Nimanan

The province is subdivided in 8 districts (*Amphoe*) and one minor district (*King Amphoe*). These are further subdivided into 63 communes (*tambon*) and 493 villages (*mubaan*).

Amphoe

1. Mueang Tak
2. Ban Tak
3. Sam Ngao
4. Mae Ramat
5. Tha Song Yang
6. Mae Sot
7. Phop Phra
8. Umphang

King Amphoe

9. Wang Chao



Climate Data for MAE SOD, THAILAND (16°N 98°E)

(<http://www.worldclimate.com/cgi-bin/grid.pl?gr=N16E098>)

This area is about 111km (69 miles) from north to south and about 106km (66 miles) from east to west. Bear in mind climates can vary widely even in an area this small, especially with altitude.

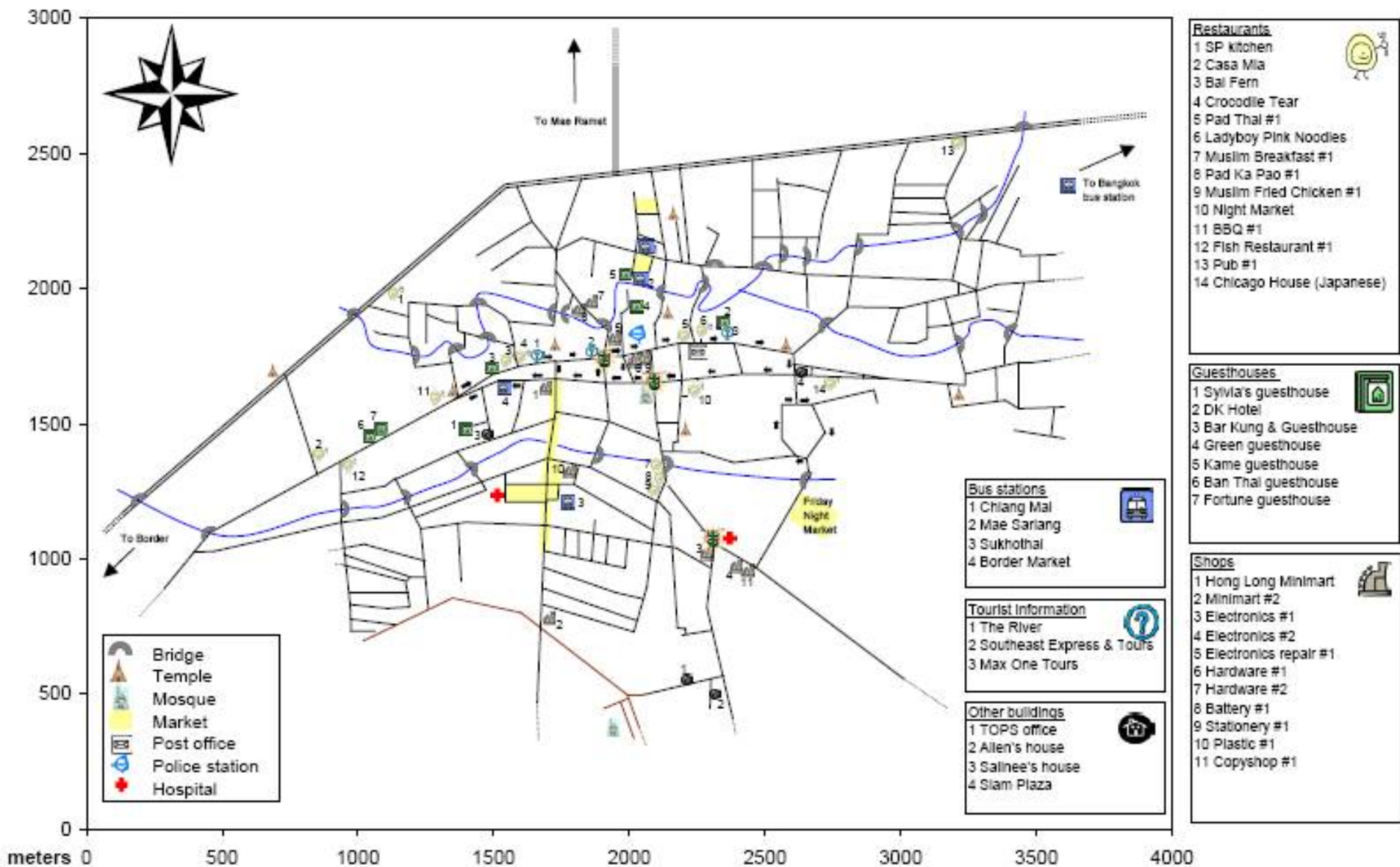
24 Hour Average Temperature

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
°C	22.8	25.3	27.5	29.7	29	27	26.6	26.5	27.2	26.9	25	21.6	26.3
°F	73	77.5	81.5	85.5	84.2	80.6	79.9	79.7	81	80.4	77	70.9	79.3

Average rainfall

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
mm	0.1	5.8	7.3	45	165.3	285.3	249	280.7	129	127.2	29.8	2.6	1387.6
inches	0	0.2	0.3	1.8	6.5	11.2	9.8	11.1	5.1	5	1.2	0.1	54.6

Mae Sot map



Created by 2006 BGET Volunteer Fredrik Bjarnegård

บริษัท ขนส่ง จำกัด (999) สถานีเดินรถแม่สอด

บริการเช่าเหมา ทักษนศึกษา คูงาน เทื่อวทั่วไทย ด้วยรถปรับอากาศ

คุณภาพทุกมาตรฐาน ราคาเป็นธรรม โทร .055 - 532949

แม่สอด - กรุงเทพฯ

- 1. 08.00 น. ปอ.1 → 17:00
- 2. 08.30 น. ปอ.2 → 17:00
- 3. 10.30 น. ปอ.2 → 18:00
- 4. 19.00 น. ปอ.2 → 3:00
- 5. 19.30 น. ปอ.2 → 4:00
- 6. 20.00 น. ปอ.2 → 4:00
- 7. 20.30 น. ปอ.2 → 4:30
- 8. ~~21.00 น. ปอ.1 → 4:30~~
- 9. 21.15 น. (วิ.ไอ.ที) → 5:00
- 10. 21.30 น. (วิ.ไอ.ที) → 5:00
- 11. 22.00 น. ปอ.1 → 5:30

กรุงเทพฯ - แม่สอด

- 1. 08.00 น. ปอ.2
- 2. 09.00 น. ปอ.1
- 3. 19.15 น. ปอ.2
- 4. 20.50 น. ปอ.2
- 5. 21.00 น. ปอ.1
- 6. 21.30 น. (วิ.ไอ.ที)
- 7. 22.00 น. ปอ.2
- 8. 22.20 น. ปอ.1
- 9. 22.30 น. (วิ.ไอ.ที)
- 10. 22.40 น. ปอ.2

Mae Sod to Bangkok

Bangkok to Mae Sod

← 2nd Class

← 1st Class

← VIP

บริการของรัฐ ขึ้นหยัดเพื่อปวงชน ทุกคนเป็นเจ้าของ

Burmese border refugee sites with population figures: September 2006



	TBBC ¹			-(%) ²
	Female	Male	Total	
Chiangmai Province				
W1 Wieng Hong (Shan Refugees)	317	287	604	-
Mae Hong Son Province				
Site 1 Ban Kwai/Nai Sol	9,328	10,003	19,331	80
Site 2 Ban Mae Surin	1,711	1,838	3,549	13
K1 Mae La Oon (Site 3)	7,676	8,351	16,037	24
K2 Mae Ra Ma Luang (Site 4)	7,385	7,836	15,221	(4)
Subtotal:	26,100	29,038	54,138	113
Tak Province				
K3 Mae La	23,928	25,028	48,956	143
K4 Umphang Mai	9,410	10,151	19,561	33
K5 Nu Pa	6,719	6,559	13,288	14
Subtotal:	40,057	41,748	81,805	190
Kanchanaburi Province				
K6 Ban Don Yang	2,237	2,180	4,417	-
Ratchaburi Province				
K7 Tham Hin	5,240	5,435	10,675	(61)
Total for sites in Thailand:	73,951	77,698	151,639	242
State of Origin of Registered Population				
62% Karen	5% Pegu			
13% Karenni	4% Unknown			
8% Tenasserim	2% Other (Chin, Kachin, Irawaddy, Magwe, Mandalay, Rakhine, Rangoon, Sagaing, Shan)			
5% Mon				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Wieng Hong: Camp Committee ■ Sites 1 & 2: Karenni Refugee Committee (KrRC) ▲ Camps K1-K7: Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) ● MON - Resettlement Sites³ 				
M1 Halochanee	1,949	2,130	4,109	22
M2 Che-daik	551	502	1,053	5
M3 Bee Ree	1,887	1,908	3,795	12
M4 Tavoy	1,501	1,454	2,965	(14)
Subtotal Mon sites:	5,888	6,034	11,922	25
Grand total all sites:	79,839	83,722	163,561	267

Notes: 1. TBBC figures include new arrivals, births & deaths since MO/UNHCR registration. 2. Change in population since previous report. 3. MRDC August 2006 population.

Mae Sod Volunteer FAQ

Q: Am I going to be living in Mae Sod?) What is the housing situation like? Can I plan to just find a place to stay upon arrival or do I need to arrange something ahead of time? **Updated 12/06**

A: Yes, you will be living in Mae Sod (Mae Sot to the farang world in/out of Thailand)... unless you choose to live in a nearby village or town and commute in - usually less than 30 minutes by motorbike... arranging for housing ahead of time is not usually an issue unless you are 1) bringing lots of stuff or 2) bringing lots of people.

There are a wide variety of options out there from basement bargain living to a fully stocked air conditioned house or apartment (Thai or Western Style). Prices for housing can range from 1000 Bhat/month to 10000 Bhat/month. If you feel these prices are too reasonable, spending 16000Bh/month is also possible if you want a huge house with a huge yard. There are also guesthouses all over Mae Sod that will generally be 100-300 TBH a night. Hot water and a private bath may cost more. For between 4000-6000 Bh/month you can get a room in a guesthouse with hot water, high speed internet, maid service, and a good location. Your housing selection may be partly determined by how you are planning to get around Mae Sod. As far as appliances, power is 220V 50Hz and ungrounded. Prevalent video protocol is PAL.

Q: How do I get to and from Mae Sod? **Updated 12/06**

A: See all attached bus schedules and maps in conjunction with the following. You can make any number of connections from Bangkok to Mae Sod (Tak, Phitsanalok, Sukhothai, and Chiang Mai). With the Mae Sod airport closed indefinitely (rumors abound that it will reopen in May 2007), the next most direct option is the overnight bus from Mo Chit Station in Bangkok. Most buses take between 8 and 11 hours. Buses come in three classes (see attached schedule)... VIP being 610 Bh with 3 seats across instead of 4, air con, a bathroom (laughable), a meal voucher (10 bh), and maximum seat reclination (if such a word exists). VIP is also supposedly the quickest public travel option although that is arguable. 1st class is ~400Bhand has four seats across, air-con, sorta seat reclination, and possibly a bathroom... and they serve tea. 2nd class is ~300Bh, has four seats across, minor seat reclination, no bathroom (although they stop about every 2-3 hours), no food, and air con. All buses should be booked at a minimum 12 hours ahead of time - you will have to make a trip out to Mo Chit to do so in person or for an extra fee your hotel or guesthouse might be able to arrange a ticket for you. 2nd class buses can only be booked the day of travel, while other classes can be booked ahead of time.

If you are not keen on a bus you can also fly to the next closest airports, Sukhothai (avg 2-3 hours from Mae Sod, but can be much much longer including all surrounding transportation issues – you can also get a direct private vehicle for about 3000Bh) or Phitsanalok which is one hour east of Sukhothai.

The train is also an option. Take the train to Phitsanalok and then catch a minibus to Mae Sod. Last minibus from Phitsanalok to Mae Sod leaves around 3pm and costs ~ 150Bh. Last minibus from Sukhothai to Mae Sod leaves around 4pm and costs ~120Bh. Minibus prices are from 2005.

Taking into account the fact that international flights and domestic bus and flight options to Mae Sod never line up, you should plan on spending at least one night in Bangkok. Even if you don't intend on spending the night in Bangkok, a backup plan is advisable!

Q: What kind of Visa should I apply for? **Updated 12/06**

A: We are not in a position to help you with a non-resident visa. See the Thai embassy webpage for a complete listing of countries and visa requirements (<http://www.thaiembassy.org/>). NOTE THAT THAI IMMIGRATION POLICIES CHANGED ON 1 October 2006!!! ALL TOURIST VISAS ARE AFFECTED!!! CHECK THE THAI EMBASSY PAGE FOR YOUR COUNTRY AND THE SPECIFIC RULES PERTAINING TO VISAS FOR THAT COUNTRY. The following information only applies to certain countries (USA and most EU countries). Although the reality of the situation is still unclear, under new rules you can only spend 90 consecutive days in Thailand whether on a thrice renewed free 30 day visa or on a 60 day (with a 30 day renewal) tourist visa. Free visa: Currently you can enter Thailand on the free 30 day tourist visa they issue you at the airport. With this free visa you can stay a total of 90 days by crossing any Thai border every 30 days to renew your visa (600 Bh for Burma -- but also a donation to the horrible government of Burma. US Dollars are no longer accepted). Tourist Visa information: If you want to avoid crossing the border during your 90 day stay in Thailand, you should apply for a 60 day tourist visa while still in your home country (can extend for 30 extra days while in Thailand) -- this will allow you to stay in the country for up to 90 days before having to leave the country (for 90 days!) to get another tourist visa. If you are staying longer than a month, apply for the 60 day tourist visa.

Q: Who will I be meeting up with when I arrive, and where (Chiang Mai, Mae Sot...)?

A: We will meet you anywhere in Mae Sod. If you tell us ahead of time what bus you are on and where you are coming from (there are at least 4 bus stations in Mae Sod) someone will be happily (unless you arrive before 5am) waiting to meet you. You can also call once you get to Mae Sod and someone will come to meet you but such a plan may be subject to many possible missed connections. Alternatively you can take a tuk-tuk or motorcycle taxi from the bus station to the office although if you arrive on a weekend (or holiday) or before 8am on a weekday with no warning, nobody will be here to greet you.

Q: What immunizations should I get and should I worry about Malaria or other diseases?

A: Immunizations... At the very least Hep A, Hep B, and Typhoid. See <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/seasia.htm> for full disclosure. Note that some medications and immunizations are cheaper in Thailand than other countries.

The malaria situation in the Mae Sod; there is malaria in the area (just as there is Dengue), although Mae Sod itself is fairly safe. Malaria is more prevalent in rural areas and refugee camps. You will be working in both. Malaria is highly debilitating and even with treatment can recur over time. Dealing with Malaria sucks. Make sure the malaria medication your doctor recommends is suggested for the Thai/Burma border.

That being said... I brought malaria medicine with me but have yet to take it as 1) I haven't felt the risk here is bad enough to justify dealing with the side effects of the meds or the costs. 2) my doctor gave me malaria medicine that is not suggested for this area as the this particular brand of malaria is resistant to Larium. Not to confuse the issue further, I know volunteers who have been here for a couple of years, do not take malaria medication, and are not really worried...but then again I know volunteers that have gotten malaria - it really sucks to get malaria. Our comments are not a recommendation. Talk to your doctor before making a decision.

Q: How much cash would you recommend coming with? Is Chiang Mai the closest ATM?

A: Mae Sod may not have a McDonalds but we are not the boonies! At the very least, Mae Sod has 5 ATMs -all very happy to take Western (if not any) Cards. Bangkok has N^ATMs. You might bring some US (or any other currency) cash to exchange in the airport (the airport also has ATMs) so you can get a taxi or the bus to your hostel. Get as many small bills from the money exchanger as possible or take x thousand and 990 Bhat out of the ATM as most small vendors in Thailand will not be able to or want to break your thousands. If you are from the USA, you might also hang on to some US cash (20 -100) as border crossings and some fees are cheaper if you pay in USD rather than Bh. Check out <http://www.xe.com/ucc/> for exchange rates for all world currencies.

Q: Do I need to bring mosquito nets or bug spray etc?

A: Mosquito nets are cheap and easy to find here so don't worry about bringing one. In a masochistic show of bravado, I have stopped using bug spray... but my sanity is also slipping. It is advised to bring the good stuff with you (99% DEET) if you plan on using bug spray. Despite constant vigilance, the worst mosquitoes in Mae Sod lurk in the TOPS/BGET office waiting to bite your feet whenever the notion strikes them. A long sleeve shirt is recommended mosquito wear.

Q: What are my transportation options while living in Mae Sod?

A: Options include renting/buying a car (30000Bh and up), motorbike (9000-50000Bh), or bicycle (700 -10000Bh). There is no formal public transportation network in Mae Sod. "Public transportation" consists of a network of song tows (modified pick up trucks with seats in the back – average 10Bh), motorbikes (10-70 Bh), and tuk-tuks (30-150Bh). Walking everywhere is also quite doable but you have to like walking...and the rain if you are in Thailand during the rainy season (starts sometime between April and June and lasts until August- October).

Q: How far will I be from Chiang Mai, and how much trouble is it to travel there?

A: 6 hour bus ride to Chiang Mai. No trouble. Between 300-400 Bh.

Q: I feel like you guys have been subtly hinting that I should bring dark chocolate. Do you have any preference as to what kind? I'm wondering how I'll keep it from all melting on the bus ride over...

A: Subtly?? We have not been subtle in the least! Mae Sod has tons of yummy food, but has a very real shortage of dark chocolate, cheese, Guinness (or any dark beer whatsoever), salami, ... we could go on and on. If you suffer from any of these horrible addictions, or are hooked on a staple only available in your own country, you might consider bringing yourself a monthly ration or two.

Please pay no attention to our shameless pleas for dark chocolate and any other foodstuffs... but, since you ask, 70% cacao is the minimum cut-off on dark chocolate and European chocolate is always superior to American. Caring for chocolate in the hot season involves good packing, guesthouse refrigerators, air conditioned transportation, and love.

Q: What is the climate in Mae Sod?

A: See (<http://www.worldclimate.com/cgi-bin/grid.pl?gr=N16E098>) for scientific data but the seasons in Tak can be divided as so... Cold season lasts from November to February which also coincides with farang season. Bring a fleece. After watching the locals bring out the hats and warm coats, laughing, and bragging about how you are not cold - you might find yourself furtively sneaking into the local bed store to buy a blanket... I would not know this from personal experience though.... Cold season is followed by HOT season which lasts from March through May and then is followed by rainy season from June through October. Tak Province is rumored to have the widest range of temperatures in all of Thailand.

Q: What are my communication options in Mae Sod?

A: Thai post, both domestic and international is incredibly cheap and efficient. The office is equipped with a phone and fax machine for outgoing domestic calls but also can accept incoming international calls as well. The office has high speed (wireless) internet as do a few guesthouses around town. Voip programs and messenger programs are available on office computers although TOPS has a full staff and computer time during work hours is limited. There are also high speed computer labs scattered about town. If you have the budget you can rent/purchase a cell phone from a variety of providers and purchase cards which allow you to pay as you go.

For calling to and from Thailand from anywhere... check out <http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/dialing.html> for dialing instructions.

Q: Should I bring little pots, pans, or utensils?

A: Unless you are particularly attached to any of these, don't bring them. You might bring a durable water bottle and losable travel coffee mug but all items are readily available and cheap in Mae Sod and Thailand.

Q: Should I bring any other items?

A: If you already own a small warm sleeping bag you are particularly attached to and you plan on travelling a lot, you might consider bringing it. If you are staying at a guest house, they will provide linens and a blanket... possibly for a small extra fee. If you are planning on renting a place, you will probably need to buy some inexpensive local sheets and possibly a blanket. When we are in the field you can probably get by with a combination TOPS sleeping bag (2 season bags and sometimes "naturally" scented) and borrowed blankets. In some situations having your own sleeping bag is helpful and easy, but you really don't need one... especially if you only own a bulky model and will have to purchase a new one. Sandals might be advisable as well. We do a lot of hiking up streams and walking around villages looking for solar panels as well as MH and RAM pump sites. You can try and emulate the locals and wear flip flops but I have recently found myself chasing a flip flop downstream or flat on my arse and wished for some sandals.

Cheap 2"x2" passport photos might also come in handy if you plan on travelling around the rest of SE Asia. You should also bring all other items you might normally take with you when travelling in a foreign country (such as DARK CHOCOLATE).

For a bunch more helpful travel information on Thailand check out: <http://www.tourismthailand.org/about/aboutthailand.aspx>

Q: Any suggestions for a reading list?

A: Any materials related to energy and renewable energy. Documents available for download on www.bget.org. Phil Thornton's **Restless Souls**

Be careful out there

Don't rely on good fortune to keep yourself safe -- some thoughts for BGET volunteers

written by Chris Greacen on 21 April 2007

I'm writing this note after several expensive brain scans and a couple amazing days and nights when I thought it was likely that I might die soon of a brain tumor. I was lucky: it turns out that I don't have a brain tumor. What I have is neurocysticercosis (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cysticercosis>) – a tapeworm that died in my brain forming a cyst that causes seizures. I almost certainly got this tape worm in a Karen village or refugee camp, eating food that was contaminated with tapeworm eggs. These come either from raw pork or from vegetables that have been exposed to pig feces.

- I'm on anti-epileptic drugs, and it's likely that the swelling in my brain will decrease over time. If not, I may need some surgery.
- Last year I had another near-death experience in a tour bus from Mae Sot to Bangkok that overturned at high speed killing several passengers and paralyzing a number of others.

These experiences bring up important, if obvious, lessons for all of us: *Don't rely on good fortune to keep yourself safe*. BGET work is wonderful in many respects. It provides fascinating opportunities to help folks in concrete and fun ways. There are countless opportunities for personal and spiritual growth. Blah blah blah. At the same time, there are some dangers that those of us that are used to middle-class America are not fully prepared for. Some key dangers include the following:

- Motorcycles, pickup trucks, buses with varying degrees of maintenance, on challenging roads, sometimes driven by people who have slept far too little or are using alcohol or other drugs.
- Parasites (malaria, dengue fever, giardia, amoebas, tape worms, etc.)
- Sharp tools, battery acid, caustic and/or toxic ingredients in cement, etc.

Draw on all resources available to you: your intuition, research, common sense, your friends. Wash your hands after you take a dump. In the end, it's your life. You're definitely not a wimp if you decide, for what ever reason, to not do something. Or to do something differently.

Think. Act deliberately. Take precautions.