



# HOW TO SURVIVE THAILAND WITH A PEANUT ALLERGY

FREE SURVIVAL GUIDE

BY ANDREW ELSASS

# May Contain Traces Of:

Serving Size 1 PDF (16 pgs)

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**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** Even though I had multiple allergic reactions from eating Thai food in America, I didn't want to let that small detail keep me from visiting someday.

That day came when my girlfriend accepted an offer to teach English in Thailand. Planning to travel with her, I naturally took to Google for reassurance that I'd be able to survive.

But beyond a few blog and message board posts on how to explain a peanut allergy to Thai waitstaff, there wasn't much practical advice for someone traveling to Thailand with my condition. Going ahead with the trip as planned, I swore I would write the guide that I wish existed before I left.

This process included taking Thai language lessons (one of the more humbling experiences of my life), asking lots of questions to locals and fellow *farang*, and a lot of scary trial and error.

Now on the other side, I hope my guide can help you or your peanut-avoidant loved one make a more educated decision on whether or not to travel to Thailand, which is truly an amazing place with so much to offer (food aside, even). I hope by reading about my journey you'll feel prepared to start your own, and safely.



# Disclaimer

I am not a physician, allergist, immunologist, or anything beyond a curious traveler that also happens to have a peanut allergy.

Thus, much of this information shouldn't be considered anything more than anecdotal. While following the advice within helped me eat mostly incident-free during my five months in Thailand, always do your own due diligence in asking the right questions to those preparing and serving your food (both abroad and at home).

Understand that there's no guarantee a dish is made the exact same way at every restaurant or street cart. So to avoid ordering some creative chef's almond-infused hot dog, always try to communicate your allergy when ordering. The tips and information in this guide are intended to help you do just that.

Additionally, consult a physician about you or your loved ones' specific circumstances before your trip and always carry EpiPens (or similar) and your fast-acting allergy medication of choice (ala Benadryl) wherever you go.

How To Survive Thailand With A Peanut Allergy Free Crash Course  
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# Foods I Ate

# Without Incident

During my five months in Thailand, I originally wanted to write down every single thing I ate without incident. However, that turned out to be a bit ambitious because that list ended up being a long one!

Instead, the list on the following page contains the Thai and Western-inspired food I saw and ate most regularly. Next to the English name for each dish is the phonetic pronunciation, a description of the dish, and its name written in Thai script (so you can show a waiter or cook).

Understand that Thai words transcribed into English can be done many different ways for a single word. This is why you can see the nation's most popular dish written as *pad thai*, *pat thai*, *phad thai*, *put thai*, or *phat tai*, among other interpretations.

I've taken some liberties with these karaoke pronunciations, writing them in a way I think is easiest for a native English speaker to understand and convey. On signs and menus, however, just know that you may see foods written in Roman letters any number of different ways.

# PRONUNCIATION NOTES

Thai is a tonal language, which means *how* you say something is just as important as what you are saying.

In Thai, there are five tones: medium/neutral, low, falling, high, and rising. This makes speaking Thai a little bit like singing, trying to hit all the correct notes and key changes. While there is *some* wiggle room, using the wrong tone can completely change the meaning of the word. To make this as easy as possible (which still isn't very easy), I've included these tonal marks next to every Thai word that follows in this guide:



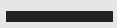
## LOW TONE

What it sounds like in English: "Uhh..." or "Umm..."



## FALLING TONE

What it sounds like in English: "Stop!" or "S\*\*t!"



## MEDIUM/NORMAL TONE

What it sounds like in English: Saying "no" flatly to someone



## RISING TONE

What it sounds like in English: "Yes?", "Huh?", or "Mom?"



## HIGH TONE

What it sounds like in English: A surprised "Really!?" or "What?!"

- Underlined consonants are the hard form. For example, **t** sounds like 'dt', **p** sounds like 'bp'. However, it's *usually* ok to not hit this 100% accurately. One exception with this (for our purposes) is **pedd** (duck) and **pedd** (spicy).
- R's are always shortly rolled in Thai, but you can get away with a soft r.

✓ **'BOAT' NOODLES** *kuay teow ruah*

ก๋วยเตี๋ยวเรือ

Rice or egg noodles in small bowls with beef, pork, or fish 'balls'. Often topped with a broth containing soy sauce, spices, herbs, and...pig or cow blood (you won't care once you taste it).

✓ **CHICKEN** *gai*

ไก่

Baked, fried, rotisserie, steak, teriyaki, wings...chicken is pretty much everywhere, from restaurant menus to stalls on any busy city street.

✓ **CHICKEN FRIED RICE** *kao pat gai*

ข้าวผัดไก่

Usually cooked with fish sauce. Delicious and my go-to when I was somewhere that served pad thai and had an otherwise limited menu.

✓ **CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP** *guay teow gai toon*

ก๋วยเตี๋ยวไก่ตุ๋น

Not quite Campbell's. Usually noodles in a sweeter broth with a vegetable and braised chicken leg on top.

✓ **FISH** *plah*

ปลา

Common varieties include tilapia, catfish, and barramundi. Dishes vary but often involve steaming or frying.

✓ **FRUIT** *pon lah mai*

ผลไม้

Fruit in Thailand is unique, delicious (well, most of it), and available everywhere. There's dragon fruit, durian, langsat, mangosteen, rambutan, pineapple, watermelon...

✓ **HAMBURGERS/PORK BURGERS** *ham buh guh* แฮมเบอร์เกอร์

The quality of pork in Thailand is of noticeably better quality than the beef, making it my recommendation whenever you have the option.

✓ **HOT DOGS** *hot dawhk / sai grawk* ฮอตดอก / ไส้กรอก

Usually mini-sized and often (but not always) sans bun. Sometimes served as a side, sometimes as a street snack on a stick.

✓ **MANGO W/ STICKY RICE** *cow neeow ma-muang* ข้าวเหนียวมะม่วง

Famous Thai dessert and pretty much what it sounds like.

✓ **NOODLES W/ BEEF/DUCK** *guay teow nua / pedd* ก๋วยเตี๋ยวเนื้อเรียง / เป็ด

Noodles, meat, and veggies. I usually saw this served as a soup, but you can also find it 'dry', too.

✓ **NOODLES W/ SOY SAUCE** *pud see ew* ผัดซีอิ๊ว

Stir-fry dish with broad rice noodles, meat, and vegetables in a dark soy sauce.

✓ **OMELET** *kai jeeow* ไข่เจียว

Often tastes of fish sauce. Commonly listed just as 'omelet' on menus.

✓ **PASTA** *pahs-taa*

พาสต้า

Spaghetti. Nothing to write Italy about, but it's commonly seen and good enough in a pinch.

✓ **PIZZA** *peez-zah*

พิซซ่า

Domino's and Pizza Hut are common, as is Thai chain The Pizza Company. Non-chain places (and Italian restaurants serving pizza) are also found nearly everywhere.

✓ **ROASTED PORK W/ BASIL** *muu owhp bai ga-prow* หมูอบใบกะเพรา

What it sounds like. More than once I heard that the pork in Thailand is so good (compared to the beef) because Thai people simply don't eat a lot of the latter.

✓ **SALAD** *sah lahd*

สลัด

When you can find them, the make-your-own salad bars in supermarkets and mall food courts are quality.

✓ **SMOOTHIES** *nahm pon-la-mai pun*

น้ำผลไม้ปั่น

As good as the fruit that goes into it is (so, pretty damn good). At some places you'll just pick what ingredients you want amongst a spread, at others there'll be set combinations.

✓ **STIR-FRIED VEGETABLES** *pud pahk*

ผัดผัก

The actual vegetables used vary, but often come in combination with pork, chicken, beef, or tofu and rice.



✓ **SUSHI** *suu-shi*

It's sushi, usually in roll form.

✓ **SWEET & SOUR CHICKEN/PORK** *gai pud preow-waan* ไก่ผัดเปรี้ยวหวาน

Commonly served at places that serve pat thai and kao pat ghai. A little different than the Westernized-Chinese version, but just as tasty.

✓ **WESTERN BREAKFAST** *khao chao*

คั่วข้าว

Common in cafes and usually consisting of eggs, toast, a few cocktail wieners they call sausages, bacon, and a side salad so flavorless you'll wonder if it's actually just a garnish.

# Foods To Avoid

## (& Thai Curry 101)

Like the list of safe foods, this list of ones to avoid is also far from comprehensive. Peanuts can make their way into and out of any dish as a cook so desires, but these common cuisines will contain nuts more often than not:



**PAT/PAD THAI** *pud thai*

ผัดไทย

Fried rice noodles tossed with spices, egg, meat or seafood, and peanuts. It sucks having to pass on Thailand's most famous dish, but that at least makes it easier to avoid.



**SATAY\*** *sa-teh*

สะเต๊ะ

Pork or chicken kebabs covered in peanut sauce. When ordering any meat on a stick, always inspect the outside closely and ask what it is (easy to do since the pronunciation is so similar).



**STIR-FRY CHICKEN W/ CASHEWS**

ไก่ผัดเม็ดมะม่วงหิมพานต์

*Gai pud met ma-muang him-mai-pahn*

The Thai version of Chinese food's kung pao chicken. This version often includes (surprise) cashews.

\* Indonesian in origin but also very popular in Thailand



## PAPAYA SALAD *som tum*

ส้มตำ

Pounded papaya with some combination of peanuts, shrimp/fish, eggplant, long bean, and fish sauce. There are some regional versions that don't contain peanuts, but it's easier and safer to avoid the dish altogether.



## CURRIES *kaeng (Thai) / kaeng ga-ree (Indian)* แกง / แกงกะหรี่

There are many types of curry served in Thailand. Not all contain nuts, but it can be hard to distinguish one kind from another. This is why I recommend avoiding all curries for simplicity and safety, especially the following varieties:

### ● KAENG HANG-LE *hung leh* แกงฮังเล

A pork stew/curry (although it has no coconut milk) containing chiles, tamarind juice, and peanuts.

### ● MASSAMAN *mutt-sa-mun* มัสมัน

Mild curry that often includes, among many other things, peanuts or cashews.

### ● PHANAENG/PANANG *pah-naeng* พะแนง

Thick red curry that often has beef or pork and whose most noticeable ingredients are chilli peppers, coconut milk, cumin, fish sauce, and peanuts.

### ● GREEN / YELLOW CURRY *gaeng khiao waan* / *gaeng ga-ree* แกงเขียวหวาน / แกงกะหรี่

Do not appear to traditionally have nuts. However, Googling either of these plus 'peanuts' yields countless recipes for the dish that do include them\*. Heed my earlier warning about curries, or have a friend order and try a small slurp of theirs, first (if you aren't deathly allergic).

\* Granted these might be Westernized versions of the dish

# Need-To-Know Phrases

Although the pronunciations and tones in the Thai are tricky, if you are interested in learning just enough to explain your allergy to waitstaff or street vendors, it's more than doable.

The key word to memorize is *tua* (too-ah): peanut. Understand that this is also the same word for a vegetable Thai people call 'long bean'. However in my experience, asking for no *tua* in the context of being a Westerner at a restaurant gets the point across 75% of the time. At "worst", you might be asked back if "Long bean ok?" When in doubt, show a picture.

And while screaming "no *tua*!" and making the universal symbol for choking might get the point across, you can do it much less dramatically by using or showing the following phrases.

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*\* Joking aside, never raise your voice at a Thai person. In a culture where it's very important to save face, you'll just look like an ass.*

# English

# Karaoke\*

# Thai

Do not put peanuts  
on it, please

  
*mai sai tua*

ไม่ใส่ถั่ว

Does this have  
peanuts?

  
*sai tua rue plow\**

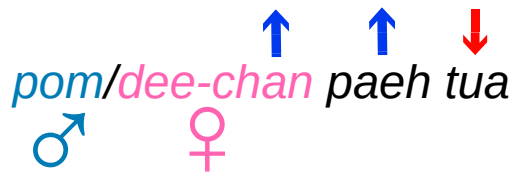
ใส่ถั่วหรือเปล่า

I can't eat peanuts

  
*geen tua mai dai*

กินถั่วไม่ได้

I have a peanut  
allergy

  
*pom/dee-chan paeh tua*

ผมแพ้ถั่ว  
ดิฉันแพ้ถั่ว


Without peanuts,  
please

  
*mai ow tua*

ไม่เอาถั่ว

\* *More literally: do you put peanuts on/in this or not?*

# PRONUNCIATION NOTES

- As noted, 'I' for men is 'pom' and 'dee-chan' for women. 
- To sound polite when ordering food or making requests, stick *krub/krap* (men) and *ka* (women) at the end of the sentence.
- *Geen* (eat) is pronounced with a hard 'g' like in the English 'go'.
- The tongue at the beginning of *tua* (peanut) should start where the roof of the mouth and teeth meet (as opposed to lower in the mouth like in 'too'). It's actually more of a 'dt' sound than a hard 't'.
- For all these expressions and words, try and say them with as neutral a tone as possible unless otherwise noted. Even though what's coming out of your mouth feels strange, avoid the temptation to raise your inflection as a way to indicate to the waitperson/cook that you are uncertain about your pronunciation (they'll already know that to be the case).
- If what you are ordering doesn't normally have nuts anyway, you might receive a polite affirmative nod or a 'duh' look in return. If what you are saying is understood, you'll probably hear something like "*Chai kahp/Chai ka*", or what you said repeated back along with that nod of understanding.

But trust your gut here: if you get the sense that the person didn't truly understand what you are trying to communicate (or didn't try to), don't risk it. Try again or go eat someplace else.

# Learn More: Get The Book

The information in this PDF should help you or your loved one travel to Thailand with a peanut allergy more confidently. However, this guide just scratches the surface on how to get the most out of your trip and really enjoy Thai food without fear.

In the full version of HTSTWAPA, you'll find everything I learned that helped me navigate Thai cuisine (mostly) successfully—and where I screwed up. In addition to even more detailed food lists and tidbits about Thai cuisine, you'll also find:

-  **More useful dining phrases and expressions, written in English, 'karaoke' Thai, and Thai script**
-  **What to do and say in an emergency**
-  **Four apps to help make smarter and safer dining decisions**
-  **A peanut-proof packing list**
-  **Where to always find a safe meal in any Thai city**
-  **Four things to remember (if you remember nothing else)**

The book also contains a short travelogue, **Six Days in Bangkok**, which details my eating adventures during my first week in Thailand. In addition to seeing everything I ate, where, the cost, and if I had a reaction or not, you'll be able to read about the challenges I faced as a complete Thailand-newbie.

Even with a peanut allergy, you certainly don't need a book to go to Thailand and live to tell the tale. But having to learn what took me five months to figure out over a more normal trip length would have been a stressful and unenjoyable experience. That's why I put everything I wish I knew before I took my trip into the full *How To Survive Thailand With A Peanut Allergy* guide.

Again, countless anti-peanutians have done Thailand without a guidebook, but if you're like me and ease your anxieties by reading about the experiences of others, you'll find the few dollars worth the peace of mind (and so will your immune system).

# Coming 2019

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# About The Author

In 2017, I lived in southeastern Thailand for five months. While there, I took Thai lessons, tried a ton of foods, and had a few allergic reactions. Also, I've had peanut and tree nut allergies my entire life. There, those are my qualifications.

As of publishing this PDF, I am an ESL teacher in Japan and a freelance writer who likes to write things that help people.

## Special Thanks & Quality Resources:

Thai-language.com was an invaluable resource during the writing of this guide, as was reddit user mr\_\_sniffles' translation and editing assistance.

A big *kahp kun kahp* also to my Thai teachers Pee Tee and Khun Pak, the helpful redditors on r/FoodAllergies and r/peanutallergy, Jacob Fox for his design critique, and to all the Thai waitstaff that didn't spike my food with nuts as revenge for butchering their language.

And as always, thanks to Elena her undying support even though every meal together is always a little terrifying for you.

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