



# SIM SURVIVAL GUIDE THAILAND EDITION

Practical guidance for expats  
managing Thai SIM cards and mobile  
data with confidence



**EXPAT TOOLBOX**

## Author's Note

The Expat Toolbox SIM Guide – Thailand Edition was written to save you from the same confusing hours I once spent trying to keep a Thai phone number alive. What started as a few rough notes for friends became part of a much larger mission — to make life in Thailand simpler, more transparent, and a little less bureaucratic.

The steps, codes, and providers listed here are based on personal use and experience at the time of writing. The advice is current at the time of writing, but Thailand being Thailand, things can change without warning. Treat this as your foundation — not gospel — and you'll stay connected wherever you are.

Welcome to your new digital life in the Land of Smiles.

*Expat Toolbox*

# Preface

This guide forms part of the *Expat Toolbox* series — a collection of practical resources designed for foreigners living long-term in Thailand. It follows the same philosophy as the *Visa Survival Guide*: no fluff, no recycled blogs, and information drawn from practical experience.

Inside, you'll learn how to:

- Choose the right network and plan for your needs.
- Register, top up, and manage your Thai SIM card.
- Solve common problems and stay connected abroad.

Whether you're a new arrival or a seasoned expat, this manual is intended to help you stay online and informed. The goal is simple: less confusion, fewer queues, and more time to actually enjoy Thailand.

Your phone number quickly becomes your lifeline here — linked to banks, immigration systems, delivery apps, and the people who make Thailand home. Knowing how to manage it properly isn't just convenience; it's part of settling in with confidence.

Take your time, bookmark the parts you'll use most, and treat this guide as a companion you'll return to. By the time you finish, the aim is that the process feels clearer and more manageable.

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# Chapter 1 – Getting Started

## Why a Thai SIM Matters

Early on, it helps to get connected. A local SIM isn't just about cheap calls; it's your link to banking apps, government sites, and every QR code you'll scan from the moment you land. Without one, you'll find yourself begging cafés for Wi-Fi passwords like a digital vagabond. A Thai number makes daily life smoother and is commonly used for services such as transport and deliveries.

## Prepaid or Postpaid

Thailand offers two basic options:

- Prepaid: Pay in advance, top up as needed, and never worry about surprise bills. Ideal for short-term visitors and new arrivals who don't yet have local ID or proof of address.
- Postpaid: Works like a UK or US contract. You'll get a monthly bill and often more data for your baht, but you'll need a valid visa and usually proof of residence.

For most expats starting out, prepaid is the low-stress way to test the waters until your paperwork and address are stable.

## Buying and Registering

You can buy a SIM at any major airport kiosk, 7-Eleven, or official store. Registration is required, usually involving a passport check and basic identity verification. If you bought one at an airport, double-check later at a local shop that your registration actually processed—occasional glitches happen, especially with late-night staff who'd rather be anywhere else.

## Recommended Providers

The big three are AIS, True-Move H, and DTAC. Coverage is broadly similar in major cities, though AIS tends to dominate rural areas.

- AIS: Reliable coverage, slightly pricier.
- True-Move H: Good value and solid data speeds.
- DTAC: Friendly service, often cheaper promos.

Some long-term residents report preferring AIS when travelling outside major cities, while others favour True-Move H for higher data use in urban areas.

## Top-Up Options

You can top up almost anywhere—7-Eleven, Family-Mart, Big C, or via mobile banking apps like Krungsri NEXT and Bangkok Bank Mobile. Electronic top-ups post instantly; printed receipts



might lag a few minutes. To check your remaining balance, dial the USSD code printed on your starter pack or use the provider's app, which conveniently doubles as a data-draining billboard.

## Quick Tips for Expats

- Keep your SIM packaging; it lists your number and essential USSD codes.
- Register your number with your banking app before opening an account—it saves a trip later.
- Set a calendar reminder for your SIM expiry if you're on prepaid. Numbers often deactivate after 90 days of inactivity.
- Don't buy SIMs from street vendors who promise "no passport needed." That's illegal, and your number can vanish overnight.
- If you plan to stay long-term, switch to a postpaid plan once you have a stable address—it simplifies renewals and gives better rates.

