

# CHANGING IMAGE: THAILAND BECAME A CANNABIS PARADISE



Thailand legalized cannabis in 2022 - before that, it was subject to draconian penalties. Now the country is the cannabis paradise for marijuana fans. But the final law is missing. Here are the rules for tourists.

A half-dozen varieties of weed are carefully arranged on a fancy metal counter. The marijuana varieties have such promising names as "Painkiller," "Gorilla Burger" or "Mango Sunset Haze." **Whether locals, tourists or expats living in Thailand, enthusiasm for the cannabis stores that have mushroomed across the country in the past six months knows no bounds.**

Since the government surprisingly legalized cannabis last June, old Siam has become the new mecca for marijuana fans from all over the world. The names of the countless stores are innovative: "Cannabangka", "Cannabis Twins", "The Chillax", "Ministry of High" and "Fat Buds Weed Shop", to name just a few. They range from rather seedy establishments to classy specialty stores. The new pop-up trucks with pot are also popular.

Thailand is the first country in Asia to permit the sale of cannabis. Whereas previously anyone taking a drag on a joint in Thailand risked jail time, it is now legal to smoke freely. In other countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia or Singapore, however, possession of weed can lead to long imprisonment or even the death penalty.

## Unique Thailand

The current legal situation supports tourism, which has been slow to recover after the Corona pandemic. The sudden opening shows how unique Thailand is. In Europe and the U.S., cannabis has been debated for decades, while here the law can change overnight - in this case in a more liberal way.

As the rules continue to be adjusted and a law to that effect is still being controversially debated in parliament, the Ministry of Health has now published a cannabis guide. The guide is titled "Ten Things Tourists Need to Know About Cannabis in Thailand." Tourism offices in each province have been instructed to distribute it. The guide is intended to help vacationers navigate the scene - and understand what is allowed and what remains illegal.

Perhaps the most important rule is that cannabis products may not be consumed by people under the age of 20. In Germany, experts caution that regular consumption poses significant health risks to young people in particular. The products are also banned for pregnant or breastfeeding women - unless under the care of medical professionals. And transporting seeds or parts of the cannabis plant to or from Thailand for personal use is not permitted.

## Business Is Booming

Because marijuana is allowed in the country, customers can basically buy as much of it as they like. Smoking the joint right on the spot, however, is not allowed - that's also in the government's

guidelines. Smoking cannabis in public places, including schools and shopping centers, is illegal. As a result, many store owners have set up private smoking corners nearby.

The architect behind the decriminalization of cannabis is Anutin Charnvirakul, Thailand's public health minister. The government even gave away one million cannabis plants to private households last year to boost production - and thus help the pandemic-weakened economy. Officially, cannabis has only been released for medical and industrial use - but since it has been removed from the list of illegal drugs, recreational use is no longer prohibited.

But until legalization is finally enshrined in law by Parliament, concerns continue to waft through the balmy tropical air with the marijuana quagmire. Most store owners, however, don't believe a complete ban will happen again - the economic benefits are too great for that, they say. There are conservative voices loudly insisting on making the use of cannabis illegal again. But that probably has more to do with politics than morality or health in the kingdom.

An editorial in the Bangkok Post recently stated that **it would be impossible to turn back the clock and punish marijuana use with prison sentences again**. That is simply unrealistic, it said. "The use of cannabis just needs to be properly regulated - especially to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands."

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