



**Population in Myanmar:**  
1,375 (2025)

**Location:**  
Tanintharyi Region,  
Mon State

**Language Family:**  
Kra-Dai

**Main Religion:**  
Buddhism (98.5%)

**Christians:**  
20 (1.5%)

## OVERVIEW

**Population:**  
1,375 in Myanmar (2024 Thailand Ministry of Foreign Affairs)  
11,734 (1931 census)

**Other Countries:**  
25,800,000 in Thailand  
328,000 in USA  
202,000 in South Korea  
150,000 in Laos  
147,000 in Malaysia<sup>2</sup>

**Other Names:**  
Bangkok Thai, Central Tai, Khon Tai, Siamese, Tai Noi, Thai Khom, Thai Klang, Thai Song

**Location:**  
Tanintharyi Region: Myeik Township in Myeik District;  
Mon State: Thanbyuzayat Township in Mawlamyine District

**Language:** Thai [tha]

**Dialects:**  
**Scripture:**  
Bible 1883  
New Testament 1843  
Portions 1834

**Jesus film:** Thai

**Global Recordings:**  
Thai #4563

**People ID:** 1277



Religious adherence



Paul Hattaway

**Location:** In 2024, the Thai government listed 1,375 speakers of the Central Thai language living in Myanmar.<sup>1</sup> They are primarily located in the Myeik District within southwest Myanmar’s Tanintharyi Region, and in Thanbyuzayat Township in Mon State. Small pockets of Thai people also reside in other parts of the country, such as embassy staff and businessmen in the major cities, but the 1,375 Thai people profiled here refer to those in established long-term communities rather than transient workers who come and go. Other sources cite much higher numbers of Thai people in Myanmar, but those figures either represent all Thai-speaking groups in Myanmar or are extrapolations from the 1931 census, when 11,734 Thai people lived in the country. There are 27.5 million speakers of Central Thai scattered across more than 50 countries of the world.<sup>2</sup>

**Identity:** In Myanmar, the Thais may be officially labeled “Shan Gale,” but they speak standard Thai and not Shan. Overall, “people in Thailand have a very low view of

Burmese people due to centuries of brutal conflict and distrust between the two neighbors.”<sup>3</sup> More than two million Burmese people live in Thailand today compared to the comparatively minuscule number of Thais who live in Myanmar.

**Language:** In Thailand, 25.8 million people speak Central Thai as their first language, with another 44.2 million using it as a second language.<sup>4</sup> In Myanmar, Central Thai is distinct from other Thai varieties, including Thai Yuan and distantly-related Tai languages such as Shan, Tai Lue, Tai Laing, and Khun.

**History:** The Thai people are believed to have migrated from southern China about 1,000 years ago.<sup>5</sup> Some Thais in Myanmar today are the descendants of prisoners of war who were taken as slaves during the many conflicts between the two countries. Some historians list 26 separate wars between these neighboring countries during the 16th to 19th centuries, of which 12 are said to have resulted in conclusive victories for Siam

(now Thailand), and 10 where the Burmese were the clear victors.<sup>6</sup> During World War Two, Thanbyuzayat was the western terminus of the notorious “Death Railway,” built by the Japanese to link Thailand and Myanmar. Tens of thousands of prisoners of war died in its construction. The infamous railway allowed Thai families to migrate west, and some of their descendants still live in the town today.<sup>7</sup>

**Customs:** The Thai people love their country, their king, and their culture.<sup>8</sup> They have a very strong sense of national identity, reinforced by the fact that Thailand is the only country in Asia never to be controlled by a colonial power. Fiercely proud of their independence, they changed their country’s name from Siam to Thailand (meaning “Land of the Free”) in 1939. Thai people are also renowned for their meekness, tolerance, and humility.<sup>9</sup> Underneath this happy veneer, however, lie major social ills that the Thais do not readily acknowledge.

**Religion:** The powerful hold that Theravada Buddhism has on the Thai people in Myanmar is seen in the 1931 census, which returned 11,734 Thai people, not one of whom identified as a Christian. The identity of Thai people is wrapped up in their culture, of which Theravada Buddhism is a major component. It is a common saying that “To be Thai is to be Buddhist.”

**Christianity:** Thailand has a reputation for being a “graveyard for missions” despite its long, 500-year-plus history since Catholics first entered the country in 1511.<sup>10</sup> Protestant work commenced more than three centuries later in 1816, but by 1957, “140 years after the beginning of resident Protestant missions, Thailand had “more Buddhist temples than Protestant church members.”<sup>11</sup> Today, only a few dozen Thai people living in Myanmar are thought to be Christians. The Central Thai remain one of the largest, yet most accessible, unreached people groups in the world.