

# THAILAND TIPS:



## DEALING WITH THAI SCRIPT IN GEOGUESSR

Thailand is organized into 76 provinces (in thai : « *changwat* »), themselves made up of numerous districts (in thai : « *amphoe* »). All in all, Thailand comprises 878 *amphoes*, not to mention the 50 Bangkok districts called « *khet* ». Each district is then divided into several subdistricts (in thai: « *tambons* »).

Provinces are named after the main city in the territory (on gmaps, the province name is usually placed on the city location). Districts are usually named after the other important towns in the province – however, rarely, it can come from natural parks or other topographic elements. Since these towns are badly reported on the map, it's difficult to spot them, so it usually requires to look for POI (point of interests) – each district has its own district hospital, then it's worth looking for the hospitals red POI.

Thailand's road system is divided into 5 categories of lanes, the 3 main ones being:

- Freeways (quite rare in large urban centers) ; 
- National roads 

These are the main roads, criss-crossing the country from Bangkok and numbered according to their direction from the capital. Their numbers are unique, and can be found on roadside markers. In short, these roads are essential for finding your way around Thailand. However, they are much less common than rural roads, which may have a similar appearance but are far more complex ;

- Rural roads 

Unlike national roads, rural roads are not ordered, and it's possible to have the same numbers in different parts of the country. They are attached to the provinces, whose abbreviations appear in front of their numbers on milestones and signs. Their numbers are counted in thousands, often 1\*\*\*, 3\*\*\*, 4\*\*\*, 5\*\*\* or 6\*\*\*. If they are attached to a province, the roads sometimes extend beyond the provincial boundary, but still retain their number and the abbreviation of the name of the province from which they originate on the milestones.

### KILOMETER MARKERS

Kilometer markers are a common sight on these roadsides. Depending on the type of road, the markers will have certain differences. All of them are based on the same model, which are subsequently completed. Here as a blank :



National road markers will look like this:



Below, the mileage, and above, the road number set in the outline of Thailand's emblem, called “Phra Khrut Pha” or “Garuda”, also the emblem of the Thai monarchy, and derived from a Hindu and then Buddhist mythological deity named 'Garuda'. Here it is:



Rural road markers will look like this:



Underneath, again, the mileage. And at the top, the emblem is painted in black, and it's only below this that the road number is inscribed. To the left of the number, the province is indicated by two letters that form its abbreviation (the dot following the two letters shows the abbreviation).

Here, these letters are :



So, these ones: **จป**

They match with the province of Chachoengsao, east of Bangkok. The letters in question both correspond to the “ch” sound:

จ	จ ชิ่ง	<i>cho ching</i>	cymbals	ch	–	/tɕʰ/	–
ป	ป ช้าง	<i>cho chang</i>	elephant	ch	t	/tɕʰ/	/t/

## RURAL ROADS AND PROVINCES

All provinces have an abbreviation, but there's one exception when it comes to rural roads: Bangkok is the only one that doesn't really have one (although several roads from neighbouring provinces cross the capital province).

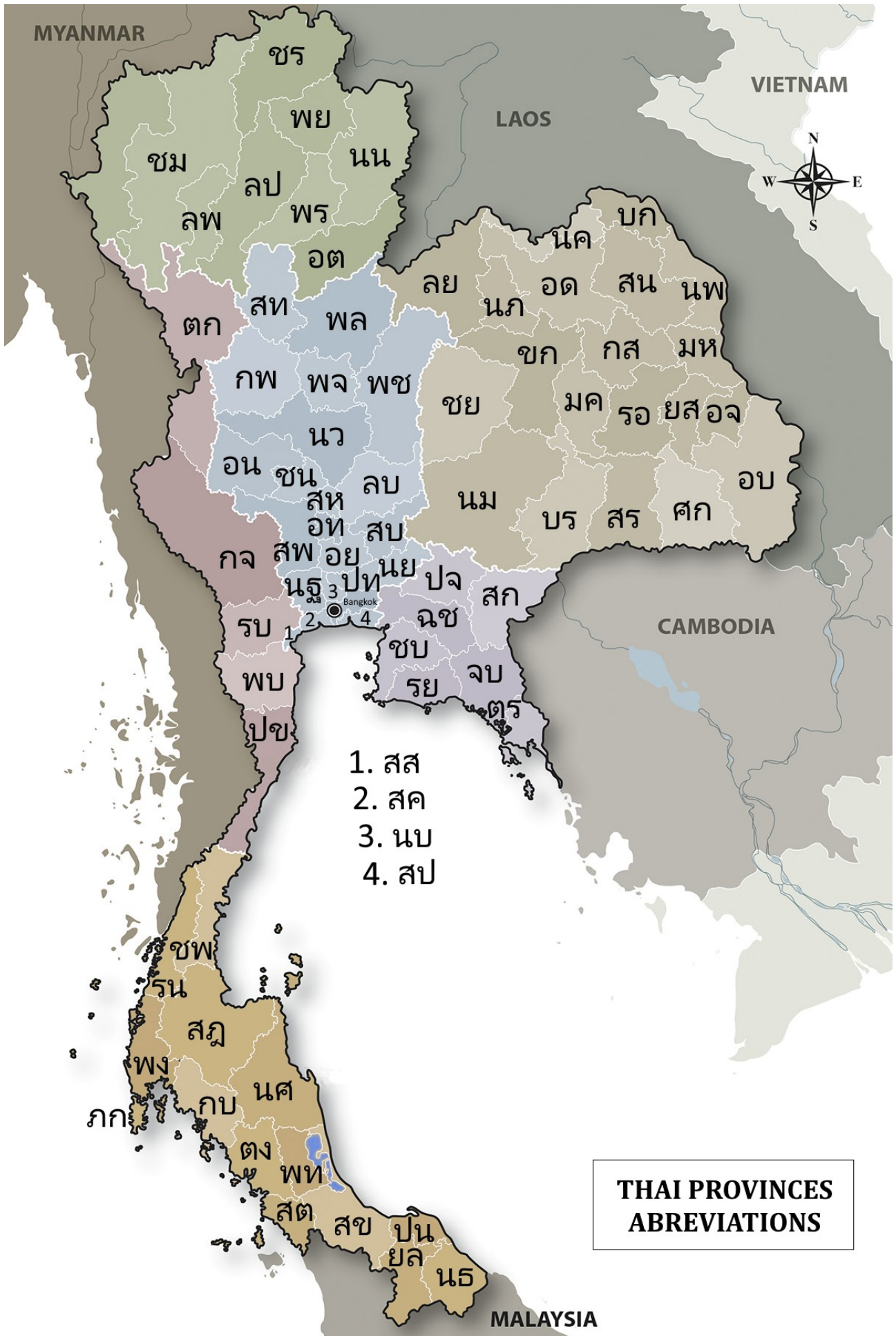
Despite their similarities, no two abbreviations are identical: each province has an abbreviation made up of two letters arranged in a unique way. The difficulty is that it can be difficult for the uninitiated to perceive the nuance between certain letters that are quite similar. See the abbreviation map on the next page (and compare with a map of the provinces for greater clarity).

The letters used for abbreviations correspond to the strong consonants of the province's name, and always include the first one (“Ph”/”Ch”/”S”/etc.). Technically, therefore, it's easier to recognize the abbreviations for each province if you already know which phonetic sound corresponds to which letter.

Not only is the road number associated with the province abbreviation found on milestones, but also, like national roads, on signs. Rural roads have their own particular colors (blue and gold) and design.

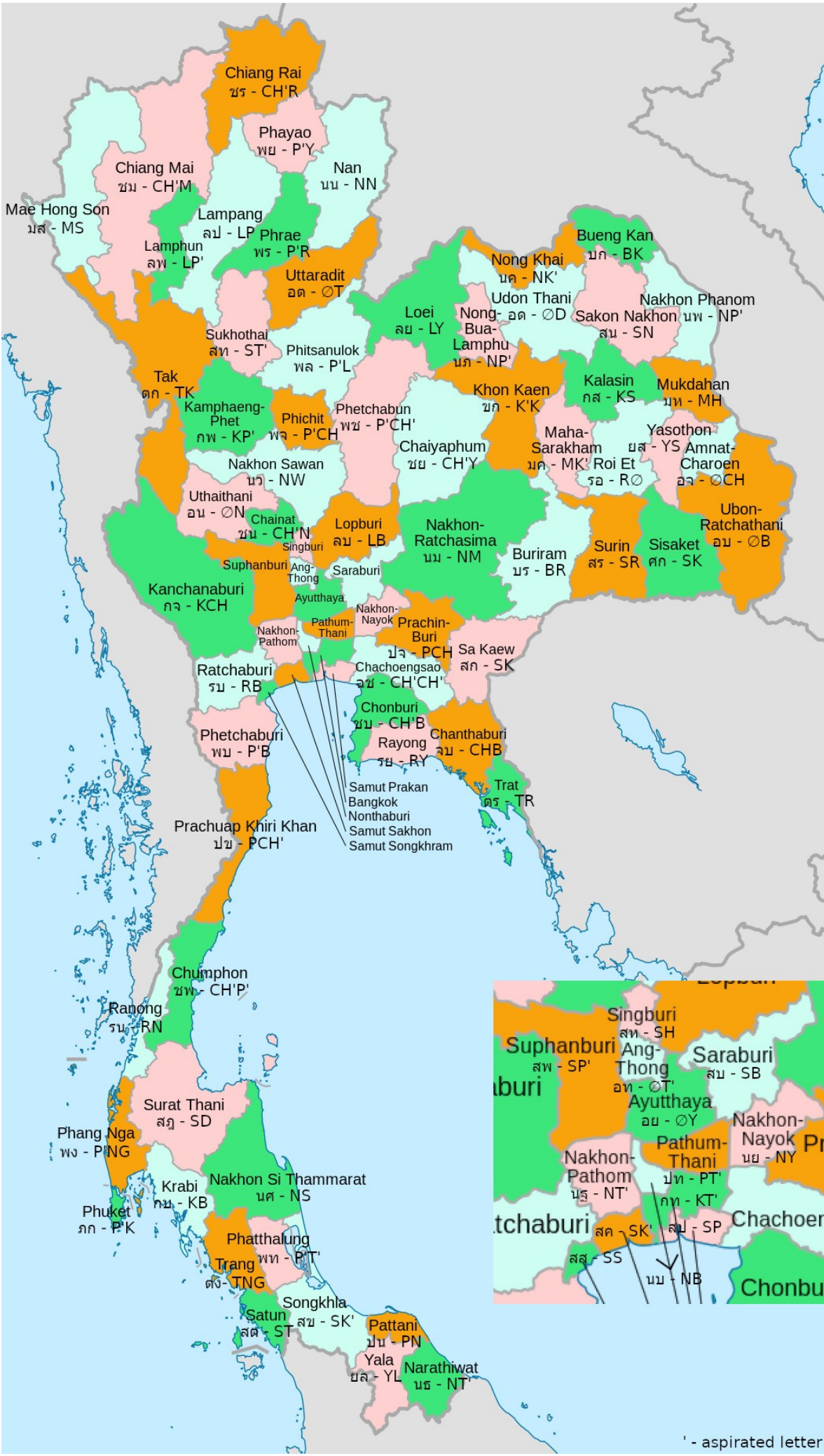


Here are two maps with the provinces and their abbreviations (I only made the first one):



**THAI PROVINCES  
ABBREVIATIONS**

- 1. สส
- 2. สค
- 3. นบ
- 4. สป



And then here's the main Thai characters used for provincial abbreviations, and their phonetic correspondence in Latin script:

ม = m	ข = <u>kh</u>
น = n	ค = <u>kh</u>
ร = r	ก = k
ล = l	ด = d
ส = s	ย = y
ศ = s	ว = w
ต = t	บ = b
ฎ = t	ป = p
ท = th	พ = ph
ฐ = th	ภ = ph
ฉ = <u>tch</u>	อ = u/ou/on/a
ฉ = ch	ง = an/ <u>ang</u>
ช = ch	ห = h

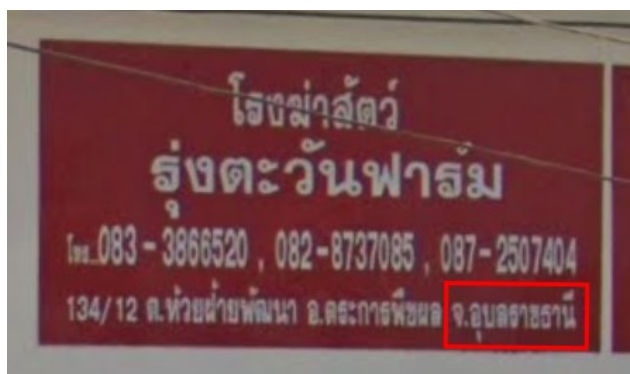
#### GETTING FURTHER WITH THAI SCRIPT: *CHANGWAT*

With even a slight basic knowledge of the main Thai characters, since Thai writing is based mainly on consonants, it's possible to start deciphering a wide range of words, such as the names of towns indicated in a certain direction (like those on the sides of milestones), or the names of provinces on certain signs. Provinces names can even be found on city or village entrance signs, on the right-hand side, following "จ." (for "changwat").

Examples (on the right of the sign, and on the left of the 20 km marker, "Nan" can be read – the province in the first case and the city in the other):



“Nan” is an easy shot, but with some practice this method is doable with all the provinces. This is all the more interesting given that the province's name is written very frequently on signs and other administrative infrastructures, much more than one might think in the first place. Here with the province of Ubon Ratchthani:



The difficulty lies in understanding when the name of the province is not written with an abbreviation (as above) but included in a sentence. In virtually every case, the name of the province is included as a single word with the term “province” (“changwat”). If translated literally, you would read: “changwatnan”, “changwatsamutprakran”, or “changwatubonratchathani”. Here is an example, again with the province of Ubon Ratchathani:



The province's name can be found just about everywhere, and sometimes on elements where it's even more difficult to determine *where* and, above all, *if* it's there at all. Then, to make the most of this written information, it's useful to identify, memorize, and look for the Thai word for province (“*changwat*”), in Thai script: จังหวัด.



Sometimes, you can even see them on the large green signs you see everywhere in rural areas:



**GETTING FURTHER WITH THAI SCRIPT: AMPHOES**

Once you've mastered this technique, you can use this knowledge to go a step further and exploit written information to the full. On most materials where you can find the name of the province, it's usually a whole address that's shown. If we get back to the village entrance sign we saw earlier:



Next to the province are, from right to left, the district (“amphoe”, or อำเภอ), the subdistrict (“tambon”, or ตำบล) and, at the top, the village (“ban”, or บ้าน – which is part of the “muban” or หมู่บ้าน, the administrative entity under the subdistrict). We can read that the district is “Tha Wang Pha”, which corresponds to an area in the central north of Nan province.

Tha Wang Pha (Thai: ท่าวังฟา, pronounced [tʰáː wāŋ pʰáː]) is a district (amphoe) in the central part of Nan province, northern Thailand.



This is a really useful information, we can now narrow the search area. As said earlier, districts are usually named after the other important towns in the province (rarely, it can come from natural parks or other topographic elements), so we can look for them. But since these towns are badly reported on the map, it usually requires to look for POI (point of interests). Each district having its own district hospital, it's especially worth looking for the hospitals red POI.

Like the provinces, the districts names are usually included as a single word with the term “district” (“amphoe”). Like the provinces, it's useful to identify, memorize, and look for the Thai word for district in Thai script: อำเภอ. And, in almost all cases, the district will be indicated if the province is also indicated.



We could try to apply this method also with the “tambon” (subdistrict) or even the “ban” (village), but the lack of accuracy of google map doesn't make it worth it (personally, I'm just hoping for a major reset of the Thailand google map).

The last thing you need to know about districts is that there's a special kind of district: the “amphoe mueang”. The “amphoe mueang” is a term used to describe the district of the province capital (in almost all cases the city that gives the province its name – Songkhla province being the most striking exception as the town Hat Yai grew much faster than the capital Mueang Songkhla due to its better transport connections). Wikipedia properly explains:

The district which contains the administrative office of the province is the *amphoe mueang* (lit. *town district*). The district is not to be confused with the capital town itself, which is a different administrative entity usually much smaller than the district. Until the 1930s, most of the capital districts had names just like other districts, whereas districts dating back to old provinces had the word *mueang* in their name. In 1938 all the capital districts were renamed *amphoe mueang*, whereas in all non-capital districts *mueang* was removed from the name.<sup>[2]</sup> The notable exception to this rule is [Ayutthaya](#), where the capital district is named [Amphoe Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya](#) (instead of *Amphoe Mueang Ayutthaya*), the same as the province, which is fully named *Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya*. Also the capital districts of Thonburi and Phra Nakhon Provinces had the same name as the province, which they kept when the two provinces were merged to form Bangkok metropolis.

In the case of the green sign we saw earlier:



Then we'll immediately be able to locate ourselves in the vicinity of the provincial capital (here Samut Songkhram), which is a great gain of time.

In most cases – and I stress this from experience – it will be very difficult to offer a definite translation for the words you read (*changwat* or *amphoe*). In particular, vowels will always be very hard to identify in the word you're going to look up on the map. Generally speaking, you'll make a prediction of the word, based mainly on the consonants, more or less accurate but unique enough to identify the word in Latin characters on the map. Reading Thai characters is difficult and obviously not an easy task, but I can guarantee that it's well worth the effort.

**That's it.** For most of the knowledge that can be exploited through Thai writing, this is a really strong basis, and you'll find it much easier to find your way around the country.

Thank you for reading this far, see you around.

## RESSOURCES

Seterra province's quiz : <https://online.seterra.com/en/vgp/3082>

Geoguessr map to learn the abbreviations :

<https://www.geoguessr.com/maps/634699819b0fb56a191a92d4>

Thai alphabet : [http://mylanguages.org/fr/thai\\_alphabet.php](http://mylanguages.org/fr/thai_alphabet.php)

Thailand road system : [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai\\_highway\\_network](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_highway_network)

More details about provinces : [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provinces\\_de\\_Tha%C3%AFlande](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provinces_de_Tha%C3%AFlande)

The map of provincial capitals, and therefore of provinces:

