



Expat Counsel

YOUR MONEY: Bringing it to Thailand and taking it out, Part II

Last time we talked about the mechanics of bringing money into Thailand. This time we'll discuss the bank accounts you can keep it in.

To begin with, in Thailand you can deposit baht or foreign currency in Thai banks. This week we'll concentrate on baht accounts.

Banks in Thailand offer three basic accounts in which to deposit Thai baht, with many small variations. The first is the current account, sometimes known as a chequing account. It is the most convenient account offered in that it usually comes with lots of options such as use of automatic teller machines (ATMs), credit or debit cards, on-line banking, telephone banking, cheques and bill payment services. The money is safer than under your mattress but just about as readily available.

But you pay for the convenience of having a current account. None of the banks we contacted offers interest on these accounts. Also, they require bigger minimum initial balances than are required on other kinds

of accounts, such as savings accounts. Kasikornbank, Siam City Bank and Bank of Ayudhya all, for example, require an initial deposit of at least 10,000 baht. Also, Siam Commercial Bank, Kasikornbank and Siam City Bank all have charges of 100 baht or so a month if your account balance drops below a certain level, usually around 1,000 baht.

Practically all of the big banks offer ATM services with current accounts. Of the banks we checked with, ATM services were free for transfers in and out of the depositor's account at an ATM in the same bank clearing area where the account was opened. After that, there is a fair amount of variation between banks.

Examples of variations between banks for ATM services are that Siam City Bank allows free service for transfers via ATM to other Siam City Bank accounts in the same clearing area but charges different fees for transfers outside the clearing area, both to Siam City Bank accounts and to other banks. Kasikornbank charges a fee of 10 baht for

every 10,000 withdrawal across clearing districts. In short, before opening the account you should ask for their list of prices for the services in connection with ATMs, if you plan to use the ATM.

The second kind of account is a savings account. The advantage of these accounts is that they pay a little interest. When we checked, Bangkok Bank, Krung Thai Bank and Siam City Bank were all paying 0.5% per year. And there is a much smaller initial deposit requirement, 500 baht for Bangkok Bank, Bank of Ayudhya and Kasikornbank.

Most of the banks with whom we checked offer ATM services with savings accounts. Also, deposits in savings accounts are often usable as collateral for loans from the same bank.

If you have sizeable transactions on short notice, however, you should check with the bank, because some of these accounts have daily limits for withdrawals. Also, as with current accounts, there are often small penalties for dropping below a minimum balance. For example, Siam City Bank

charges 50 baht a month for accounts that have dropped below 500 baht for more than a year.

As you can see from the above, we've done a fair amount of leg work with the banks. We've only discussed a few of the most standard products, however. For example, several of the banks discussed above offer special deposit accounts with higher interest rates but less flexibility. Also, the terms such as interest rates fluctuate all the time. Before opening an account, therefore, you should check with a couple of banks yourself.

Next time we'll talk about the third kind of baht account you can have, and move on to foreign currency accounts. ■

James Finch of Chavalit Finch and Partners (finch@chavalitfinchlaw.com) and Nilobon Tangprasit of Siam City Law Offices Limited (nilobon@siamcitylaw.com). For more information visit www.chavalitfinchlaw.com.

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