

Chiang Mai - Mae Sai Visa Run by Green Bus

Hi - I'm Gary, a friend of Don's. This year I've had a multiple-entry Non-Immigrant B Visa which required me to exit the country every 90 days. That's all this page is about - going from Chiang Mai to Tachileik, Burma via Mae Sai for a visa run, the easiest way I know. What visa you get is up to you and I don't know anything about it. Check Don's other pages.

I have a car, but it's a gas-hog and it would cost me three times as much to drive rather than ride. I start by going to Bus Station Number 2, at least a few days early. Here's why - there is only one truly great seat on the Green Bus (it's 1A), and we're not the only people who know that. What you don't want to do is go the morning you leave and take the last seat (assuming you can get even that). I did that once and when I sat in the seat (back right corner) for five seconds, I knew I couldn't stand it for eight hours. I was going to leave and drive, but the stewardess found me an open acceptable seat. The second time, I went two days ahead and got Seat 1A going up and 3B back. 3B is decent but those seats recline A LOT and so I had my neighbor in front of me in my lap the whole way back. This last time, I went two days early, and I got 2A up and 1B back. There are five rows (two on the right and one on the left) of OK seats. Behind that - forget it.

Bus Station 2 GPS Coordinates are: N 18.79987 E 099.01739

So I repeat - if traveling alone go to the station a week early and get seat 1A. If you're traveling with someone - get 1 B and 1C. That's it! You've been warned. Try not to think about the headrest, which has been designed to inflict maximum discomfort.



So - Bus Station 2 is down by Big C Extra, but across the highway on the east side, just north of McDonald's. There is car parking in lots to the right - 40 baht for the day. Below are pictures of the front of the station and if you go in the door shown, the Green Bus Office is right inside there on the left. Get a number from the machine if there's a line. Don't worry - the girls speak some English. You need to know (1) to Mae Sai and return, (2) the day you're going, (3) the times up and back, and (4) the seat you want. I go up at 08:00 which arrives at Mae Sai at 12:20 and I book the 14:30 return. That's plenty of time. If you want to do some shopping or get lunch, you can return at 15:50 or 16:30 I think. I've never bothered with shopping. A fellow visa runner told me he went into Burma and found the vendors too aggressive.



DO NOT GO LATE! The buses leave promptly. My driver started the bus on the last note of the national anthem. Bus leaves from Gate 20 (or sometimes 21).



The bus stops at both Bus Stations in Chiang Rai, before going on the Mae Sai. BTW, the bus will stop at some Police Checkpoints; maybe two or three each way. No biggie (assuming you're not carrying kilos of heroin unwrapped in your lap). I never saw them bother a farang. I get my Thai driver's license out and have it ready. One policeman looked at it briefly. I told him "pom kon Thai" (I'm a Thai person) and he complimented me on my mastery of three words in Thai language. Your passport is handy if the policeman asks for ID.

So - four hours and forty minutes later you get to Mae Sai. I did not take a picture of the little red bus at Mae Sai. Don't worry about it - everybody knows where you're going. You'd have to make arrangements to go anywhere BUT the border. It's 15 baht and they will cram you in like sardines if possible. I didn't see any taxi-meters and baht-bikes so there is no choice. It's maybe 15 minutes to the border - end of the line.



Border GPS Coordinates are: N 20.44277 E 099.88130

That's about what you see when the red bus drops you off. Go first where the arrow points. That's Thai Immigration to exit Thailand. There they will just take your departure card and stamp you out; maybe have the little camera look at you. Thirty seconds. Pass on through there and you'll see this bridge to Burma (mind they drive on the right). At the end of the bridge is the entrance to Burma as in this second picture below.



Next you have to pay 500 baht to Burma. The office is under the sign on the right side. I have read that it's 500 baht OR \$10.00 USD. The guys don't want the \$10 (guess why). I've never tried it. I suppose it's worth trying to save \$7.00. You go in here:



After this, it's back across the bridge to get your Thai stamp/visa. I forgot to take a picture so I'll tell you that you pass a desk where people are filling out Departure Cards, but no cards are there at the table. You have to go to a guy at a desk before Customs and ask for a blank card. Fill it out. Now make a short line to leave Thailand and get what you came all this way for - your new permission to stay. I got 90 days, but it's the last I can get on the current visa. Good luck - hope you get what you want.

Check your time. As I mentioned, I left CM at 08:00, arrived MS at 12:20. I had plenty of time for coffee, as it took me maybe 30 minutes into Burma and back. Allow 20 minutes to get back to the bus station. All the Red Buses are going there; just find the next one leaving and go.

Here - no extra charge. There is only one toilet (that I ever found) at the border. It's here - at the left of the exit from Thailand. Enter the gate and it's down on the left. Might not be toilet paper (as usual), but it's clean.

