

MOVING TO THAILAND

How To Get That 'Dongle' Working

There are loads of reasonably priced internet cafes in Thailand. So why go to the bother of setting up your mobile phone to access the internet? Apart from the fact that we think it's rather cool to surf the net using our phone, there are a couple of very practical reasons. Mobile internet access works everywhere your phone does – so no need to drag yourself away from the beach or bar just to check your email. In fact, we have been able to surf the net in some of the remotest parts of rural Thailand.

Another good reason is that accessing the internet using your phone can be more secure than an internet cafe. There is no telling what manner of computer "malware" lurks on the average internet cafe PC. Add to this the possibility that the owner themselves may have set up software to record everything you type and suddenly online banking at an internet cafe looks about as safe as swimming in a jet ski area!

The first step is to purchase a Thai SIM card if you don't already have one. These are very cheap and freely available. We recommend 1 2 Call. They charge 1 baht per minute for internet access and currently have a number of flat-rate plans that include a monthly charge of 200 baht for 50 hours and 1000 baht for unlimited access.

Once you have installed your Thai SIM, you will need to activate internet access. With 1 2 Call, this can be achieved by calling their service centre on 1175. Follow the voice prompts and you will be connected to an English-speaking operator. We found them to be very helpful and friendly with an excellent command of English. You can subscribe to one of their internet plans at the same time.

The service centre will send the necessary

settings to your phone. We recommend that you turn your phone off and on again after saving the settings. You should now be ready to start surfing the net using the internet browser built into your phone. The huge variety of mobile phones prevents us from describing exactly where you can find this on your phone's menu. Once you open your phone's browser, you should be taken to 1 2 Call's home page where you can access all manner of web sites.

The next step for most people will be to set up their phone for email. We wanted to access our Gmail



account using the browser built into our phone but found we were unable to do so. In the past, we have had similar problems with a Yahoo/DTAC combination. However, recently we were able to set up a DTAC phone to access Yahoo mail without any problems.

Luckily there is a simple solution. Google and Yahoo both offer free email programs that can be downloaded to your phone from their web sites. Once we installed Google's Gmail program, everything worked like a charm and we busied ourselves sending and receiving emails while enjoying a few cool ones at our favourite hostelry.

Be warned that a fairly recent model phone is required to run these programs. The web sites check your phone before downloading and warn you if the program is not compatible with your phone.

If your phone is not compatible and you have a laptop with you, all is not lost. You should still be able to check your email by connecting to the internet using your phone. There are a couple of ways that this can be achieved but be warned this is not for the technically faint-hearted!

Our least favourite method is to buy a USB cable to connect your phone and laptop.

Original manufacturer's cables are likely to cost more than a wild night on the town in Patong so search for the "knock-off" cables available almost everywhere in Thailand.

You will also need to download a driver for the cable. Apart from the difficulty of downloading a driver without access to the internet, we have found these drivers to be full of bugs and a source of major instability on our system.

For this reason, we prefer to use Bluetooth. Of course, both your phone and laptop will need to support Bluetooth. If your laptop lacks Bluetooth support, an inexpensive USB Bluetooth "dongle" can be purchased at most computer shops – we did however have some trouble locating one here in Phuket.

We set up our Windows XP laptop to access the internet using a late model Nokia phone. While the procedure for other versions of Windows and phone models should be similar, we don't have space for precise details.

When you first plug in the Bluetooth "dongle", Windows should install all of the necessary drivers. Of course, if Bluetooth is built into your laptop then the drivers will already be installed. If your "dongle" came with a CD then you may need to install the drivers from the CD. We recommend you try the Windows drivers first and only resort to the supplied CD if things don't work.

Once the driver installation is finished Windows should display the message "Your new hardware is installed and ready to use".

The next step is to "pair" your phone and laptop. Right click on the Bluetooth icon in the task bar and select the "Add a Bluetooth device" option. Windows will lead you through the connection "wizard". Make sure Bluetooth is enabled on your phone and select the "My device is up and ready to be found" option on the first screen of the wizard.

Click on the "Next" button and Windows will search for and display a list of any

Continued Page 30