

# Isan



## Quick Facts

### Population:

Thailand: 20,000,000

### Major Cities:

Bangkok-1,000,000

Udon Thani-220,000

Khonkaen-141,000

**Religion:** Theravada Buddhism

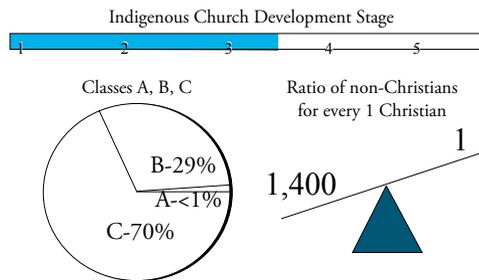
**Believers:** 0.07%

**Scriptures:** Portions

**Ministry Tools:** GRB

**C Status:** 3 **M Status:** 2

**MS Subgroups:** 4+



Class A- Are members of a Culturally Relevant Church  
 Class B- Have close access to a CRC, but have not yet joined  
 Class C- Have no reasonable or close access to a CRC

**Identity:** Linguistically, the Isan are a bridge group between the Thai and the Lao. Culturally and genetically, the population has also been influenced by the Khmer, and a certain measure of Indianization. The word Isan is Sanskrit in origin relating both to the god Shiva, and to an ancient mon-Khmer kingdom called Isana which once ruled this region of northeastern Thailand.

**Lifestyle:** The Thai consider the Isan to be an inferior people, and thus have left the region largely undeveloped. The province of Isan is only 6% urbanized. The rest of the population engages in subsistence farming, living well below the poverty line. The climate is semi-tropical and prone to extremes of both drought and flooding each year. In Bangkok, the Isan work in the lowest paying jobs.

**Customs:** Traditionally, Isan men and women both wear a *sarong*, or long skirt. For women, the *sarong* has an

embroidered pattern at the end of the Sarong, and for men there is a striped pattern. Rural houses are usually built high above the ground on 6-8 foot stilts. The lower area can be used as a daytime living area, kitchen, or livestock shelter. Isan silk production and cloth has now become famous throughout the world.

**Religion:** Every Isan village has a Buddhist temple, or *wat*, which also serves as the community hall for meetings, festivals and celebrations. The word *wat* is a Lao word that means school, referring to the practice of training and ordaining monks. Bell-shaped towers near the *wat* contain relics from the Buddha which are believed to possess magical powers to heal and ward off evil. Pre-Buddhist traditions of spirit-appeasement, ritual sacrifice, taboo adherence, and shamanism are still widely practiced.

**Christian Outreach:** Missionaries among the Isan describe the last decade as a period of incredible openness and

harvest. Around 500 small churches and house-fellowships are now established. The Bible in Isan will soon be available, and is much anticipated by the growing number of new believers. Many Isan are coming to faith in Christ simply through reading or listening to the Scriptures in their own language.

## How to Pray:

✞ Praise God for the move of His Holy Spirit throughout the Isan people. Pray for more laborers to be thrust out into this “white field” of harvest that millions may come to faith in Christ.

✞ Pray for the widespread distribution of the new Isan Bible which has already proven its incredible worth wherever it has been used.

✞ Pray for unity and reconciliation between Thai and Isan believers, who are now brothers and sisters in Christ. Praise God for the few Thai believers who have repented of their prejudice towards the Isan and are now taking the gospel of salvation to them.

✞ Pray for this spiritual breakthrough among the Isan to impact the surrounding minority Buddhist peoples in Isan province.

**Every year 180,000 Isan die without Christ.**