

## The Isan of Thailand

Somchai lay down wearily on his bed. Another night shift as a bar boy had just ended. The **Isan** young man hated prostituting himself to foreign gay men just to support his impoverished family in the village but felt he had little choice. "This is fated," he thought. "I'm paying for the sins of my past life. Avoiding this suffering will risk another bad reincarnation. After all, supporting my family will help me accumulate good 'karma'." His eyes misted as he thought of his girlfriend Duang back home. He dreaded her reaction should she find out what his actual job in Bangkok was.

The **Isan** are said to be named after Phra Isuan, the Hindu god of destruction (Iswara or Siva). This name dates back to the days when Hinduism influenced this part of Southeast Asia. Most of the 17.78 million **Isan** people live in northeast Thailand, a region also known as **Isan**. The **Isan** continue to speak their own language at home rather than Thai despite past government attempts to suppress their mother tongue. Poverty is widespread, forcing many **Isan** to migrate to larger cities and towns to work. A high proportion of both female and male prostitutes in the red light districts in Bangkok and Pattaya are of **Isan** ethnicity.

Predominantly Theravada Buddhist, the **Isan** emphasise on virtuous actions, in the hope that this will bring a better life in their next reincarnation. Christian radio and other effective media have produced fruit with some having knowledge of Christ. Few (0.4%) of the **Isan** profess Christianity.

- Ask God to send more Christian workers to disciple those who want to follow Christ. Since the **Isan** live in such a widespread area, it is difficult to disciple new believers.
- Pray that the few **Isan** believers will grow strong in their faith and share the gospel with their friends and families.
- Pray that mission workers will reach the **Isan** with the Gospel and help to alleviate poverty in their own **Isan** region and in the cities such as Bangkok.

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<https://joshuaproject.net/>, <http://www.globalprayerdigest.org/>,  
<http://asiaharvest.org/people-group-profiles/>