

Catering on State Railway of Thailand (SRT) Trains

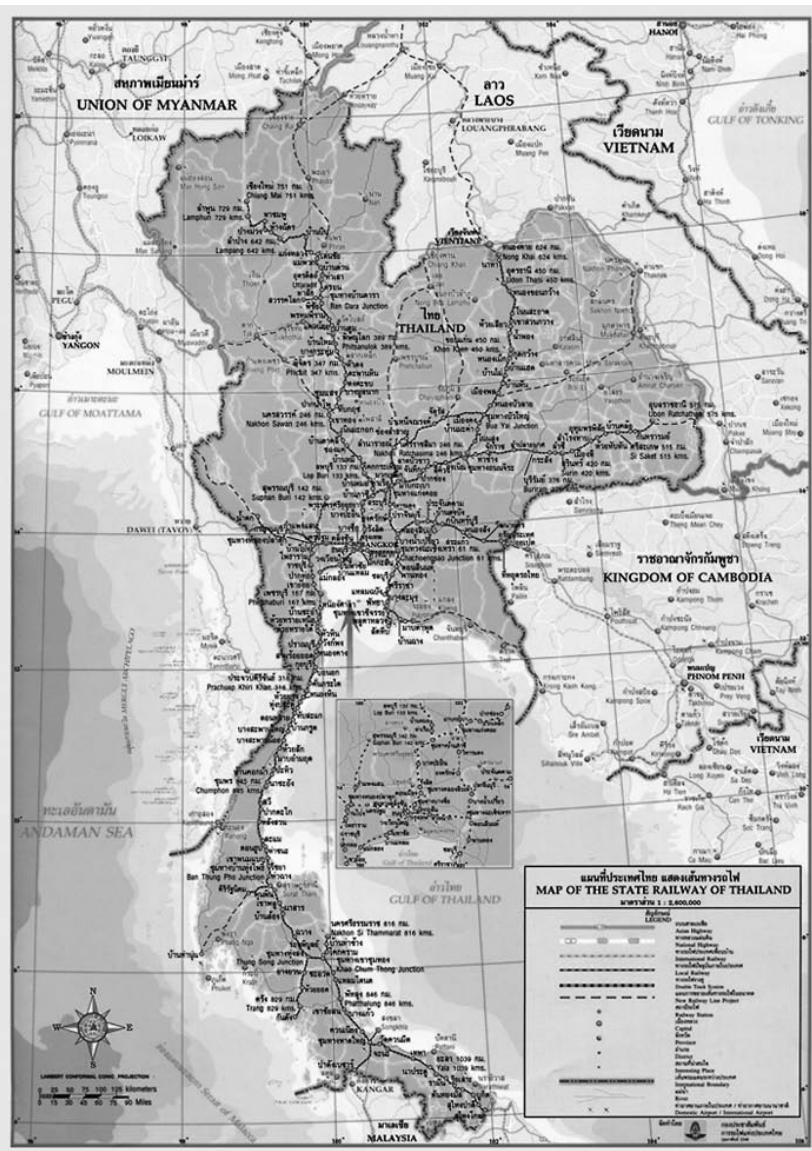
Pensri Kalyanamitra

SRT Background

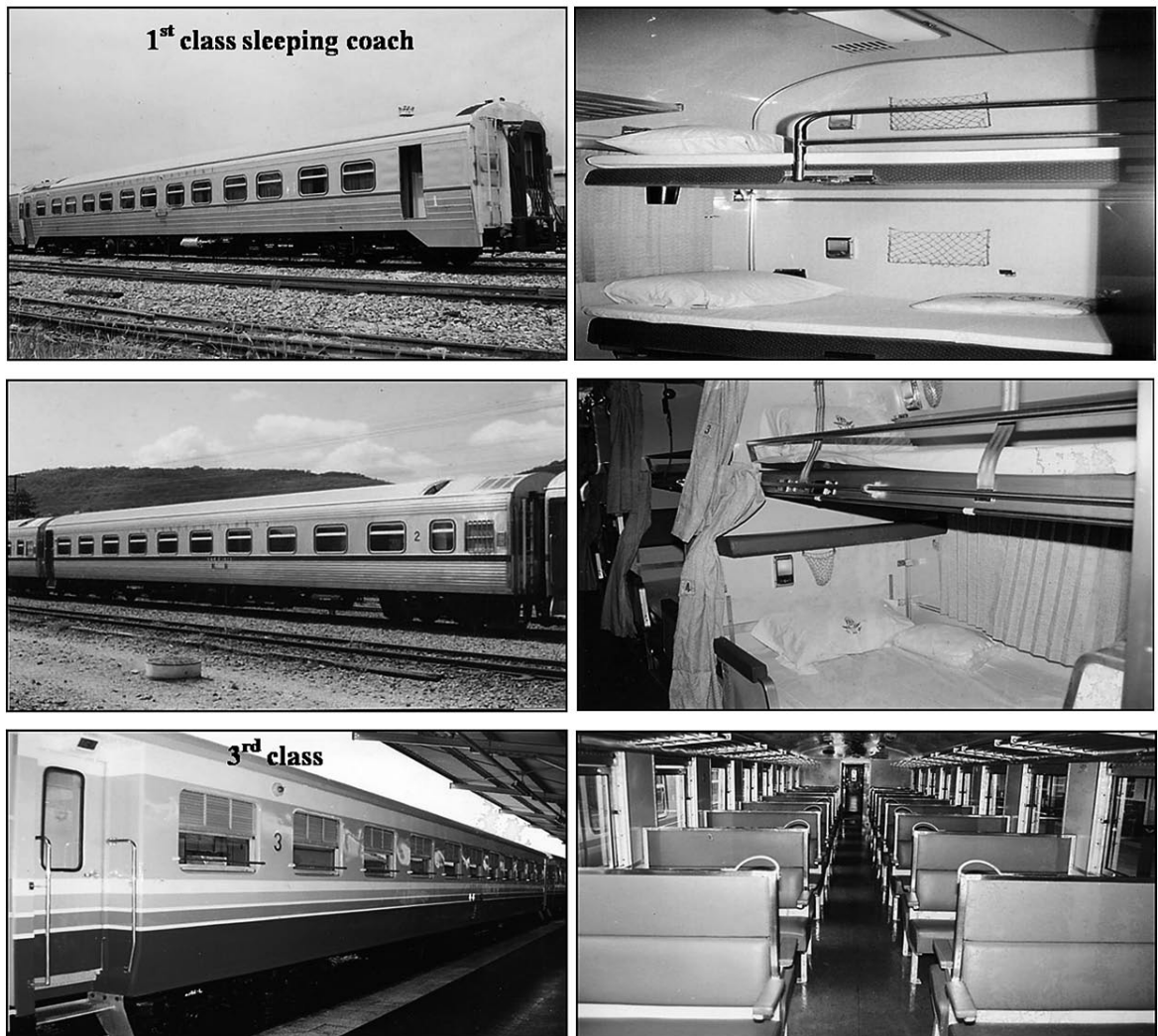
The Royal State Railways of Siam (RSR) was established in 1895 under the Ministry of Public Works. Construction of the first line between Bangkok and Nakhonratchasima started in 1891 and the first service was run from Bangkok to Ayutthaya on 26 March 1896. The Thonburi–Phetchaburi section of the

southern line opened later on 19 June 1903. The northern line was originally built to standard gauge (1435 mm), but it was decided to standardize on meter gauge in September 1919 and the northern line was re-gauged over the next 10 years to link with the neighbouring countries of today's Malaysia, Cambodia, and Myanmar. On 1 July 1951, RSR changed its name to the present State Railway of Thailand (SRT). During SRT's long history, it has passed through many modernization phases to improve the organization but although SRT and other authorities are working closely on railway reconstruction plans, there have been few changes in the SRT administration due to internal and external factors. Currently, the government has provisionally approved an investment of about 180 billion baht (US\$5.8 billion) in SRT to develop rail by upgrading the existing infrastructure; these plans include the Track and Bridge Rehabilitation Project, Track Doubling Project, Electric Diesel Locomotive Purchasing Project, Installing Signalling and Level Crossing Project, etc. In addition, SRT has implemented a Restructuring Plan by establishing three business units: Traffic, Property, and Rolling Stock Maintenance, as well as one subsidiary to operate the Airport Rail Link Project.

In FY2010, SRT carried 45.1 million passengers for 8187 million passenger-km, both year-on-year drops of 5% and 7%, respectively, due to a shortage of serviceable rolling stock to meet customers' needs. Moreover, many trains were cancelled during the period of political unrest. In freight, SRT hauled 11.6 million tonnes for 2701 million tonne-km, representing year-on-year increases and decreases of 1%, respectively, due to the growth in transport between ICD Lat Krabang and Laem Chabang hampered by inadequate locomotives and wagons for customers' needs. Currently ongoing



Map of the State Railway of Thailand network (SRT)



Types of SRT carriages

(SRT)

SRT projects are the Track Doubling Project on the Eastern Seaboard Line, and Track Rehabilitation; SRT has embarked on developing rail links in the east of the country to improve container traffic between ICD Lat Krabang and Laem Chabang deep-sea port. Two sections have been approved: from Chachoengsao to Laem Chabang (78 km), and from Chachoengsao to Kaeng Khoi (106 km). Phase 5 of the Track Rehabilitation Project covering Kaeng Khoi Junction to Kaeng Sua Ten (37 km), Suranarai to Bua Yai Junction (192 km), and Thanon Jira Junction to Bua Yai Junction (79 km), and Phase 6 from Bua Yai Junction to Nong khai (278 km) are intended to strengthen rail transport by preventing rail cracking and broken rails caused by excessive wear on the main line and to enhance operation safety and efficiency. In FY2010, SRT was operating 5 steam, 225 diesel-electric and 31 diesel-hydraulic locomotives (including shunters), 230 diesel railcars, 1242 passenger carriages (including 273 sleepers, 69 restaurant cars, and 83 baggage cars) and 5549 freight wagons.

The Airport Rail Link (ARL) to Suvarnabhumi International

Airport was designed for use by airport Express Line and commuter City Line services. The ARL is mostly elevated, although the last 2.8 km between the Lat Krabang and Suvarnabhumi stations is underground, with an underground terminal at the airport. Express services take 15 minutes and commuters 27 minutes. On 7 December 2010, the government approved SRT establishing a subsidiary called the SRT Electrified Train Company Limited to operate the ARL from 06:00 to 24:00 with both airport and commuter services departing every 15 minutes. Passengers can connect to Phaya Thai BTS Station at Phaya Thai ARL Station by taking the City Line commuter. Since 4 January 2011, Makkasan Station has offered a daily baggage check-in service from 08:00 to 21:00 for passengers travelling on international flights of Thai Airways.

Travel by SRT Train

It is not an exaggeration to say that no trip to Thailand is complete without spending time on a train, which are an



Various SRT locomotives (top) and onboard dishes (bottom)

(SRT)

economical and comfortable means to get around, and a great way to see the country. The extensive network reaches the furthest extremities of Thailand's borders with Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia. This includes Chiangmai in the north; Nong khai in the northeast (Laos); Ubon Ratchathani in the northeast; Aranyaprathet in the east (Cambodia), Kanchanaburi in the west (Myanmar), and Sungai golok and Padang Besar in the south continuing to Malaysia and Singapore. In addition to the joint service with Malaysian Railways (KTMB), international services between Thailand and Laos started across the friendship bridge over the Mekong River on 5 March 2009, using Thanaleng as the international station.

SRT operates ordinary, rapid, express, and special express trains with three different train classes. First-class services contain one private air conditioned compartment for two passengers in equal-sized upper and lower berths, and boasts a wash basin, in-room luggage racks, and space. This class is available only on selected trains and tends to get booked-out first. In the compartment, passengers can adjust the air-conditioner to the desired cooling level and turn out the lights and lock the door for added security. Adjacent first-class compartments have a connecting door to travel with a group of friends in comfort and style. For those travelling alone, an entire first-class compartment can be booked for an added single supplement charge of about 300 baht—less than the price of an additional first-class ticket. Second-class non-air-conditioned and air-conditioned coaches are available as either seated carriage or sleeper. These cars contain 40 facing, paired seats that convert into reasonably comfortable couchettes for overnight trips. Each berth has its own reading light, pillow, blanket, and a fresh set of sheets; luggage can be stored in convenient racks next to the berth. Security on board is available, but it is best to keep valuables with you. The more expensive lower berths are larger and more comfortable. Both upper and lower have curtains for privacy. Third-class trains consist of hard wooden and leather

benches suitable for only the more seasoned traveller. Third-class tickets are sold a few hours before departure with no prebookings. There is no guarantee of a seat in third class, which is often standing-room-only during peak periods and long weekends. However, taking a third-class train to Kanchanaburi or Aranyaprathet is a great scenic adventure.

Catering on SRT Trains

You'll never be hungry when travelling by train in Thailand. Even before boarding the train, there are always a few restaurants in and around most railway stations. Bangkok Railway Station (Hualamphong) has a huge variety of food available, including a cafeteria, restaurant, some fast-food

outlets and fresh fruit stands as well as drinks pushcarts on the platform. Moreover, all classes of train have refreshment facilities and most have full catering with convenient foods and instant meals, snacks and drinks. Food is served on long-distance ordinary, rapid, express, and special express trains either in the passenger carriages or in the restaurant car, which have been in service in Thailand since 1922. At present, there are both air-conditioned and non-air-conditioned restaurant cars on trains serving the northern, northeastern, and southern lines. SRT has given 2-year concessions to NP Rity Co., Ltd. and Pornpanya Thurakit Partnership to run catering services on the trains. The SRT-approved menus for convenience foods, instant meals, snacks, and drinks are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Onboard Menu

<i>Khao phat</i> fried rice	Usually with chicken, beef, shrimp, pork, squid, crab, pineapple and vegetables
<i>Khao Radna</i> rice with various (spice) toppings	Rice with Thai holy basil (chili & basil leaves), and mixed seafood, spicy shrimp, squid, pork, ham or chicken on top
<i>Pat JEuut</i> stir fry	Sauté mixed vegetables in oyster sauce, stir fried mixed vegetables, sweet and sour stir-fried seafood, and stir-fried chicken with cashew nuts
<i>Pat phet</i> spicy stir fry	Includes shrimp, pork, and chicken
<i>Yum</i> spicy salad	Spicy shrimp or squid salad, spicy grilled pork salad, spicy minced pork salad
<i>Tom Yum</i> sour spicy soup	Usually includes shrimp or pork or chicken
<i>Tom JEuut</i> mild soup	Jelly noodle soup with minced pork, minced pork and soya bean curd soup, mixed seafood soup
Breakfast	American breakfast (orange juice, 2 eggs, ham sausage, bread & butter, fruit and coffee or tea) and boiled rice with squid, shrimp, fish, chicken, pork, mixed seafood
Special menu	Green curry chicken, pork chop steak, pork paneng, stir-fried crab curry, fried fish topped with chili sauce
Various special set menus	Breakfast and dinner sets
Delicatessen and snacks	Congee, dry noodles, fried sausage, dried cashew nuts, spaghetti with various sauces, mixed nuts, chips
Local dishes	Northern spicy sausage, northeastern sausage or southern seafood
Fruits	Various delicious Thai fruits
Drinks	Hot and iced coffee/tea, pure water, cube ice, soft drinks, milk, soda, beers, liquors, wines, canned coffee, orange juice



Breakfast set menus

(SRT)



Choice of Thai dishes

(SRT)



Dinner set menu

(SRT)

Serving Food and Drinks on Train

Passengers ordering food and drinks can choose to eat in their seat or in the restaurant car; they can also buy food and drinks on station platforms. In-seat catering services are offered in both non-air-conditioned and air-conditioned carriages by restaurant car staff walking through the train and handing out printed menus. The price is the same whether the meal is eaten in the restaurant car or in the seat. A removable 'table' is attached to the wall between two facing seats in second-class sleepers. The restaurant car on second- and third-class non-air-conditioned trains has simple cafeteria-style tables while the restaurant car on first- and second-class air-conditioned trains is nicer with wall decorations, etc. Most overnight sleepers have a restaurant car serving a full menu from breakfast starting at 05:30 to dinner ending at around 22:00. In addition to meals, dining staff pass through the train with ice-cold soft drinks and beer until about 22:00. Passengers in third class can also enjoy independent food vendors who board trains at stations as well. Food vendors



Restaurant car

(SRT)



SRT Conference coaches

(SRT)

on station platforms offer cold drinks including beer, dried pork, fried noodles, and other packaged local snacks. Every station seems to have pushcart vendors on the platforms selling soup, fresh fruit and local foods. They run up to hungry passengers leaning out of open windows to try to make a sale in the briefest time.

Catering on SRT

When each 2-year catering contract ends, the concessionaires must rebid for the concession by proposing a project for ordinary, rapid, express, and special express trains including menus for convenience foods and instant meals, snacks and drinks by specifying the foods, quantities (grams) per serving, colour pictures, ingredients, date of manufacture, expiry date, as well as cooking directions. In addition, the provisioning methods, storage space, and food preparation both on and off the train have to be explained along with price lists and action if there is a deficiency of food and/or drinks. A demonstration of the food cooking procedure, plus details of the kitchen utensils, staff and their qualifications, responsibilities, uniforms and name tag must all be listed. The proposal must also list how wastes and garbage will be disposed of. The bidder with the best proposal overall is awarded the concession.

Group Catering

In addition to the above standard catering services, SRT has conference coaches for groups wishing to work and eat at the same time. These coaches can also be served by karaoke entertainment systems.

The reservation-only Luxury Eastern & Oriental Express, running between Thailand (Bangkok, Kanchanaburi, Chiangmai and Khonkhean), Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur) and Singapore also offers fine dining and wonderful sightseeing for international travellers. ■



Pensri Kalyanamitra

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