Siam Legal International Reports US Visa Changes Affecting Thai Nationals in 2026

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Siam Legal International, a full-service law firm with more than 22 years of experience assisting both foreign nationals and Thai citizens with US visa and immigration matters, is noting that the US immigration landscape has become significantly more complex for Thai nationals in 2026 following a series of major policy changes affecting visa processing timelines, eligibility, and documentation requirements across multiple categories.

The most consequential development for Thai nationals in 2026 is a policy that took effect on January 21, 2026, when the US Department of State paused all immigrant visa issuances to nationals of 75 countries, including Thailand. The stated rationale was that immigrants from these countries have a high rate of claiming public assistance and that existing vetting procedures needed reassessment. The pause affects family-based immigrant visas including CR-1 and IR-1 spouse visas, all family preference categories, employment-based immigrant visas, and Diversity Visa lottery winners who are Thai nationals. Applications can still be submitted, and interviews still take place, but no immigrant visa will be issued while the pause remains in effect. As of August 2026, the pause has no announced end date. Thailand's government has formally pushed back against the policy, with the Thai Foreign Minister meeting US Embassy officials in Bangkok in January 2026 to question the decision, noting that over 320,000 Thai nationals in the United

States work, live, and pay taxes there.

The pause does not affect nonimmigrant visas of any kind. The K-1 fiancé visa, classified as a nonimmigrant visa, remains fully active as a pathway for Thai partners of US citizens. The end-to-end K-1 timeline currently runs approximately 12 to 18 months, with USCIS petition processing averaging around 10 months followed by consular processing at the US Embassy in Bangkok. Government fees total approximately USD 1,400 to 1,900. The US citizen petitioner must individually meet 100% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, currently USD 21,640 for a household of two, and joint sponsors are not accepted at the Bangkok embassy.

Social media vetting now represents a new layer of scrutiny affecting nearly every Thai visa applicant in 2026. Following a State Department directive in May 2025 that initially applied to F, M, and J visa categories, the requirement has since expanded through December 2025 and March 2026 to cover K-1, H-1B, and over a dozen additional categories. Applicants must disclose all social media usernames and platforms used in the past five years on the DS-160 form, including inactive and deleted accounts, and profiles must be set to publicly visible before the visa interview. Consular officers review publicly available content as part of the admissibility assessment, with inconsistencies between application data and online profiles capable of triggering additional administrative processing or denial. An undisclosed social media account is not treated as an oversight but as a potential indicator that the applicant is not being truthful, which can affect the credibility of the entire application.

"US immigration for Thai nationals in 2026 requires significantly more preparation than it did even twelve months ago," said Rex Baay, Senior Immigration Consultant and Operations Manager at Siam Legal International. "The immigrant visa pause has effectively halted the CR-1 and IR-1 pathway for Thai spouses, the social media vetting requirement now applies to nearly every category, and the tighter public charge enforcement means financial documentation gets closer scrutiny even for short visits. None of this makes getting a US visa impossible, but it does mean that starting earlier, gathering stronger documentation, and reviewing your online presence before applying are no longer optional steps." A comprehensive overview of US visa options and 2026 policy changes affecting Thai nationals is available in Siam Legal's US visa from Thailand guide.

Enforcement of the public charge standard has also tightened considerably since late 2025. State Department internal guidance issued in November 2025 instructed consular officers globally to weigh a broader range of factors when assessing whether an applicant is likely to rely on US public benefits, including health, age, financial resources, employment history, family situation, and English proficiency. For B-1/B-2 tourist visa applicants, this means clear proof of financial self-sufficiency is worth preparing even for applications that might previously have been straightforward. Thai students heading to the United States for fall semester entry should aim to have their I-20 and DS-160 ready no later than April, given compressed timelines from the 2025 interview suspension and enhanced vetting that remain in place through 2026. Thai

professionals seeking H-1B sponsorship should note that even renewal applicants now face social media vetting if their renewal is processed abroad.

Siam Legal International is a full-service law firm with more than 22 years of experience, with offices in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Pattaya. The firm provides comprehensive legal and immigration support across residency planning, application processing, and long-term compliance.

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Siam Legal International

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