

TRAVEL

# Exploring Thailand: Why 7-Eleven became our family's favourite stop

On our family vacation, our biggest bonding moments came at 7-Eleven, which felt like a cultural attraction full of tempting snacks.

Jan. 15, 2026   



7-Eleven is headquartered in Japan, but Thailand also has a dense concentration of stores, stocking products that reflect local culture.

Mumemories/iStock

---

By Shawna Cohen Special to the Star

On vacation in Thailand, my family and I visit Bangkok's majestic Wat Pho, marvelling at the temple's 150-foot-long reclining Buddha covered in gold leaf. In Chiang Mai, we ride ATVs through the rugged Mae Taeng Valley, then raft in challenging whitewater rapids while elephants roam the river banks. We spot pigs on Koh Madsum and bright-orange clown fish while snorkelling Koh Samui. But nothing compares to the thrills we find in 7-Eleven.

Yes, the same 7-Eleven chain that conjures up images of hot dogs rotating under heat lamps in North America. All across Asia, the ubiquitous convenience stores barely resemble their Western counterparts.

Here, they act as a cultural hub and one-stop shop for locals, who can run multiple errands under one roof (buying groceries, grabbing a quick lunch, paying bills). Tourists are flocking to such stores as well. According to Hilton's 2026 trend report, 77 per cent of travellers enjoy "grocery store tourism" for authentic, local food and drink options while abroad.

With more than 15,000 stores in Thailand, there's a 7-Eleven on almost every corner, sometimes even across the street from each other. (The Tokyo-headquartered company boasts around 22,000 stores in Japan, but Thailand ranks second in store numbers.)



Snack hauls on social media platforms, such as TikTok, have contributed to the rise of a new trend: "grocery tourism."

Tea/Dreamstime

Shelves are stocked with everything from fresh toasties (ready to be pressed in a George Foreman-like grill) to durian-flavoured candy to cutely packaged skin care. Many products have gone viral on TikTok — bottled Thai milk tea, herbal inhalers, snacks that taste like mango sticky rice — thanks to their distinct flavours and affordability. Cans of soda cost less than \$1; ready-to-eat meals around \$2.

It's in Bangkok that my family first discovers the magic of 7-Eleven. In search of SIM cards, we venture into a store half a block away from our hotel. Within minutes, my 16-year-old son grabs a packaged lava cake from the refrigerated section and asks for it to be heated in the microwave.

I find my older son, 20, perusing the huge selection of Lay's potato chips, with flavours such as grilled squid, salted egg and Mieng Kam Krob Ros. (He settles on spicy lobster.) I quickly put my husband on SIM-card duty because the rows upon rows of beauty products, all in travel-size sachets, have my jaw on the floor.



Some of the writer's store finds, including hot chili squid chips and beauty products.

Shawna Cohen

Most of the locals I meet tell me that 7-Eleven, open 24/7, is very much a part of their daily life. Sure, tourists get a kick out of the unique-to-us snack flavours, but the chain is used by citizens for everyday essentials, including fresh coffee, surprisingly tasty meals (dumplings, rice bowls, Thai curries) and over-the-counter medicine. They can even pay utility bills at the cash register.

The best part of our 7-Eleven obsession, at least for me, is that my kids never say no to a visit. In Chiang Mai, when I suggest we wander a night market for cool crafts, they call me “cringe” and tell me they’ll be exploring on their own. Typical teenage energy. But when I insist we stop at 7-Eleven, they’re game. We go together as a family. There are no negotiations, no eye-rolling.

We spend close to an hour scouring the shelves. The boys load up on spicy seaweed snacks and Thai tea-flavoured biscuit sticks. I buy products recommended by beauty influencers flooding my Instagram feed. (Top picks: Clear Nose UV Defender, Rojukiss face masks, Coconut Soft lip scrub.)



Writer Shawna Cohen with her 16-year-old son, Isaac, during their family trip to Thailand.

Shawna Cohen

The store is hopping at 10:30 p.m. on a Saturday. There are festive balloons in orange and green, crop-top-clad girls giggling in the snack section, an elderly couple in the checkout line holding canned beans and toothpaste.

It's a place we're all happy to drop into, day or night, for a quick dopamine hit (in the form of food or cosmetics, naturally). "I'm going to miss 7-Eleven," I sigh. "It's my home away from home," jokes my 16-year-old. It's a mini-supermarket, pharmacy, coffee shop, health-food store, gathering place — all wrapped into one. Sadly, there's nothing like it in Canada.

## Related Stories

---



The most authentic meal you can have on a trip isn't at a restaurant. Here's how you can get a true taste of local life

---



The new R&R: rest and reading. Why book-club retreats are trending in travel

---

[REPORT AN ERROR](#)

[JOURNALISTIC STANDARDS](#)

[ABOUT THE STAR](#)

---

—