

How many vowel lengths are there

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From: M. Ranjit Mathews (ranjit_mathews_at_yahoo.com)

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A Hungarian who lived in France for a time said that he wouldn't spell the French name Thoma with a long o. I was surprised by this because in Malayalam, Thoma is spelt with a long o and the French pronunciation sounds to me quite close to the Malayalam [t[OmA] spelt with 2 long vowels <O> and <A>.

How many vowel lengths are there in common use, according to phoneticians? How many of these vowel lengths are considered short and how many are considered long?