

Thailand and Laos for Culture Lovers

Highlights

- ✚ Experience the magnificent temples and palaces in Bangkok
- ✚ Explore mysterious hill tribe villages in Chiang Rai, learn thousand-year long history about Luang Prabang
- ✚ Cruise along one of Mekong's most scenic and pristine sections
- ✚ Thailand and Laos will let you totally absorb the spirit of the two Buddhist countries and leave on you with a profound impression.
- ✚ Culture lovers, do not miss it!

Itinerary

Day 1

Depart from North America today on an overnight connecting flight to Thailand.

Day 2 **Bangkok**

Welcome to Bangkok. The world's best city and Thailand's bustling capital arriving late evening. Upon arrival at Suvarnabhumi Airport, your local tour guide will greet and escort you to your hotel for check-in. Adelphi Suites Hotel.

Day 3 **Bangkok**

After breakfast at the hotel, you will start with a visit to Wat Traimit, Temple of the Golden Buddha, famous for its 900-year-old and five-and-a-half-ton solid gold image. Next is Wat Arun, better known as the Temple of Dawn, which is one of the most published images of Bangkok. After that, explore Wat Po, the largest and oldest temple in this city that houses the largest single Buddha figure, the Reclining Buddha. After lunch comes the highlight of today's tour - the renowned Grand Palace, one of the must-sees that adjoins Wat Phra Kaew, the most important Buddhist temple in Thailand.

Adelphi Suites Hotel (Breakfast and Lunch included)

Day 4 **Bangkok - Ayutthaya - Bangkok**

Today you travel to Ayutthaya, the former capital of Thailand. The first place you'll visit is Bang Pa-In Royal Palace, one of the most beautiful summer palaces in this country. This is followed by a tour to Wat Yai Chaimongkhon, in which you can observe one of the biggest Reclining Buddha statues as well as the ruins of the old Grand Palace and temples. At noon, drive to the pier for a cruise down Chao Phraya River back to Bangkok, during which you will be impressed by the Thai rural life along the river. Lunch with varieties of Thai/Western buffet is served on board. For the rest of the day you might enjoy a siesta or venture out on your own for a foot massage.

Adelphi Suites Hel (Breakfast and Lunch included)

Day 5 Bangkok - Chiang Mai

Check out and depart for Chiang Mai by air. After arrival, check in to the hotel and take a short rest. Later, we'll drive to the quaint and picturesque Meo Hill Tribe Village, where you can dress up in tribal costumes or shoot the crossbow. Continue on to visit Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, a highly revered temple that sits on the top of Mount Doi Suthep overlooking Chiang Mai.

Royal Princess Hotel (Breakfast and Lunch included)

Day 6 Chiang Mai

We begin with a morning visit to the Maetaman Elephant Camp, which gives you a close-up with these talented animals. Included is an exciting elephant ride along the trails, followed by an ox-cart ride back to the camp. In the afternoon you'll enjoy brilliant white-water rafting along Mae Taeng River. Returning to Chiang Mai, you'll have some free time on your own.

Royal Princess Hotel (Breakfast and Lunch included)

Day 7 Chiang Mai - Chiang Rai

Today after breakfast, you will go to Chiang Rai with stop at the hot spring for some relaxation. Later, have a break at the Golden Triangle in Chiang Sean, where the three borders of Myanmar-Laos-Thailand meet. After lunch, drive to the Mae Sai Border. Here you can walk across the border for a visit inside Myanmar. (immigration fee cash 10 USD not included). The last site you will visit today are the Akha and Yao hill tribe villages, where you'll have a good time with the indigenous tribal people wearing dazzling ethnic

clothing.

The Legend (Breakfast and Lunch included)

Day 8 Chiang Rai - Chiang Khong - Houayxay - Pakbeng

After Breakfast and check out you will drive to Chiang Khong, a district in the northeastern part of Chiang Rai. Here you will cross the river by boat to Houayxay, Laos. Here your Laos guide will take you through the visa process. (immigration fee cash 45 USD, 46 USD on Sundays, not included) When the visa is ready, you will board the cruiser leaving Houayxay Pier for a cruise down the Mekong River to Pakbeng.

En route, a pull over is made to observe the rural lifestyle of a remote hill tribe village along the Mekong River. A buffet lunch is served on board. The boat arrives at Pakbeng before sunset for an overnight stay.

Mekong Riverside Lodge (Breakfast and Lunch included)

Day 9 Pakbeng - Luang Prabang

If you like, explore Pakbeng Market in the early morning before breakfast, where people from the surrounding village of minorities have exotic goods on sale. After lunch the boat departs for the second part of the trip. With a stopover at a riverside village, you can observe the process of making traditional rice alcohol. A buffet lunch is served on board. The boat stops again opposite the mouth of the Nam Ou River to visit Pak Ou Caves, a sacred Buddha shrine. We'll arrive in Luang Prabang before sunset. Upon arrival, our guide and driver will meet you at the pier and then transfer to the hotel for check-in. Santi Resort & Spa (Breakfast and Lunch included)

Day 10 Luang Prabang

If you wish, observe the alms-giving procession in the early morning at 5:40 followed with a visit to the morning Phousi Market. After breakfast, you'll enjoy a short tour seeing the city's oldest temple Wat Sene and Wat Xieng Thong, a significant monument to the spirit of religion, royalty and traditional art. Later you'll visit the impressive Wat Visoun, the oldest temple that houses many Buddha figures. Next is Wat Aham, the 'Monastery of the Blossomed Heart' which exudes serenity, and Wat Mai, the largest and most richly decorated of the temples in the city. Tour the Royal Palace Museum (which will be rescheduled if it happens to be closed Tuesdays)

After that, you may want to climb up to the top of Mount Phousi to explore the sacred stupa as well as capture a beautiful view of the city and the Mekong River at sunset. By evening, it's your chance to venture the night market on your own and observe local life. Santi Resort & Spa (Breakfast and Lunch included)

Day 11 Luang Prabang - Vientiane

We continue with an excursion towards Kuang Si Falls. En route, visit villages of Lao ethnic minority groups at Ban Ouay to gain some insight and knowledge of their life. Have a blast at Kuang Si Falls! It's a paradise where you can fill your lungs with fresh air and splash in the water like a child.

After the play time you'll be transferred to Luang Prabang airport for travel to the capital city, Vientiane. Upon arrival, our guide will meet you and escort you to the hotel for check-in.

Mercure (Breakfast included)

Day 12 Vientiane

After breakfast, we start visiting the major sights of the capital, including Wat Sisaket, the oldest temple with thousands of miniature Buddha statues, and the former royal temple Wat Prakeo, which previously housed the famous Emerald Buddha figure. Enroute to Lao's national precious heritage, That Luang Stupa, you will have a chance to take pictures of the imposing Patuxay Monument, well known as Vientiane's Arc de Triumph. In the afternoon, we'll hit the road again to see the Buddha Park, where there are hundreds of Buddha and Hindu statues brought from India, most of which are as old as 500 years or even more. A spectacular view over the Mekong River at sunset is a perfect way to finish the day.

Mercure (Breakfast and Lunch included)

Day 13 Vientiane - Bangkok

You will have free time till our guide meets you and escorts you to the airport for your international flight back to Bangkok. (or if you have chosen, on to Siam Reap, Cambodia)

After check in, you will have free time to explore the local shops, street markets and sights.

Berkeley Hotel Pratunam (Breakfast included)

Day 14 Bangkok – North America

This morning you will be transferred to the airport for your international flight home arriving on the same date as departure. (Or if you have chosen, continue in Bangkok for three more nights)

Extension (Additional \$987 CAD)

Day 1 Bangkok

Today you will get away from the hectic pace of Bangkok and escape to a world unknown to the tourist trail. Spend a day relaxing with a local fisherman and his family, along with your experience guide. Explore a beautiful place full of wildlife, traditional Thai agriculture and view how the locals really live on a daily basis.

The Berkeley Hotel (Breakfast included)

Day 2 Bangkok

Up early today as you will be picked up at 5:00 am for a VIP trip to Tiger Temple. This is a truly once-in-a-lifetime experience that you won't get anywhere else in the world. This is hands on with young tiger cubs and feeding, bathing and walking with the adult tigers. Don't forget your camera this day. After lunch you will return to Bangkok for free time.

Berkeley Hotel Pratunam (Breakfast included)

Day 3 Bangkok

This is the last full day and your day to shop, explore or relax, as you wish.

Berkeley Hotel Pratunam (Breakfast included)

Day 4 Bangkok - North America

This morning you will be transferred to the airport for your international flight home arriving on the same date as departure.

Price

\$3635.00 CAD (land only) \$3305.00 USD

Pricing is an estimate only and is subject to change based on availability and other factors. You can use this tour as the basis for a custom tour if you would like but pricing for custom tours may differ depending on changes made. Please note below what is included and not included below:

Included:

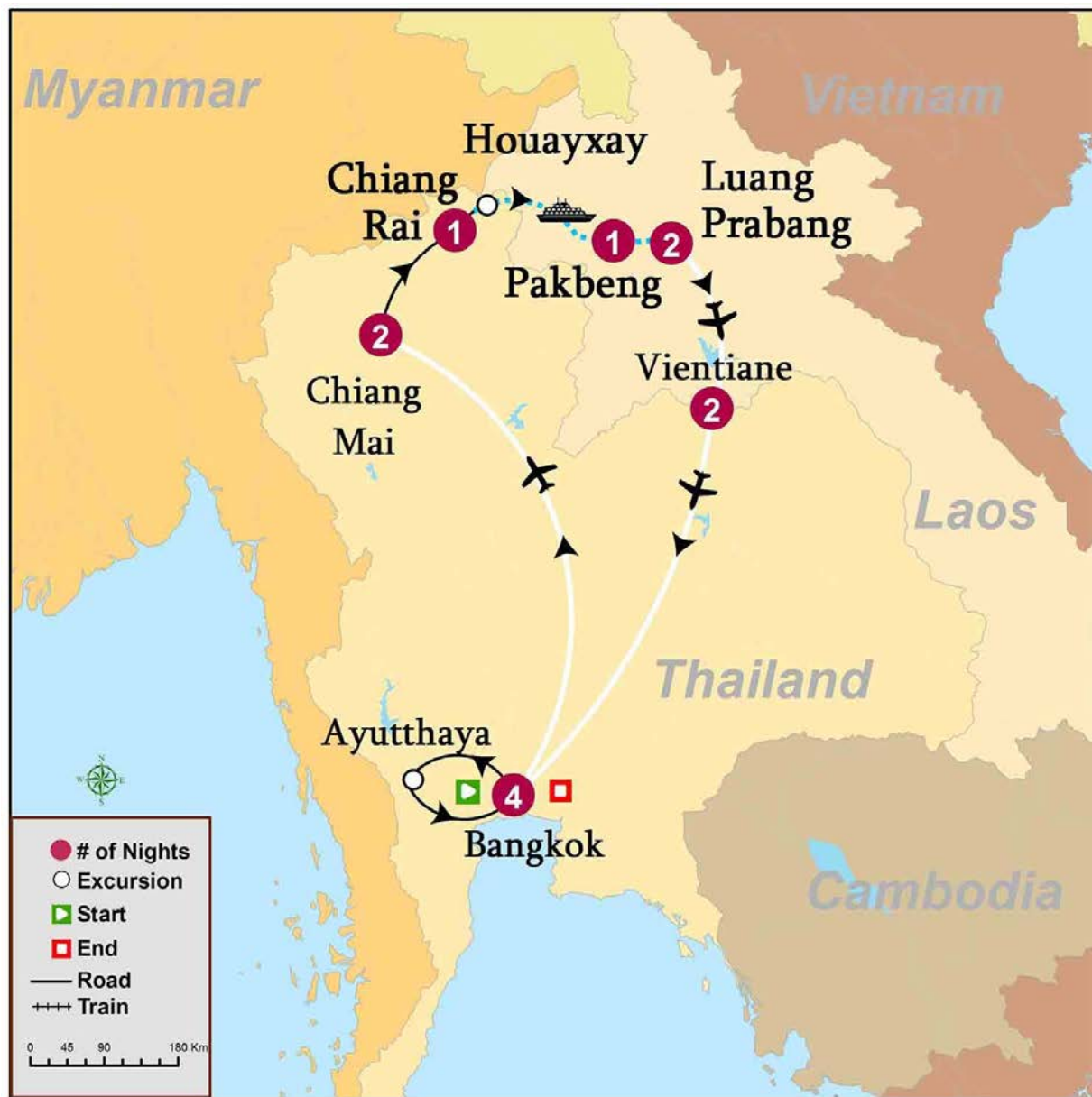
- ✓ All hotel accommodation
- ✓ All meals as per itinerary
- ✓ All sightseeing tours as specified by the itinerary
- ✓ All domestic flights: Chiang Mai, Luang Prabang - Vientiane, Vientiane

Not included:

- ⊗ Travel insurance
- ⊗ Excess baggage charges
- ⊗ Visa fees (if applicable)
- ⊗ Meals and beverages not specified on itinerary
- ⊗ Items of a personal nature such as laundry and gratuities
- ⊗ International Flight

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Map



Bangkok

Chiang Mai

Chiang Rai

Luang Prabang

Vientiane

Travel Guide

Kingdom of Thailand (Prathet Thai)



Location: Asia

Status: UN Member Country

Capital City: Bangkok (*Krung Thep*)

Main Cities: Chiang Mai, Chon Buri, Phuket

Population: 66,000,000

Area: 513,120 km²

Currency: Baht (THB)

Languages: Thai, Chinese, Malay

Religions: Buddhist, Muslim

Calling code: +66

Drive on the left

As one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, Thailand has something for everyone with its rich culture and exotic adventures. Whether you are there to relax on one of the stunning beaches in the south, trek through the northern jungle, or indulge in sumptuous cuisine in the bustling capital city, the 'Land of Smiles' is the perfect holiday destination.

Best time to go

Anytime is a good time to visit Thailand. The high season is typically November through April when it is a bit dryer and cooler. To avoid the crowds, go from May to October.

General Information

Passport and visa

A passport with at least six months validity from the date of entry is required. Visitors from most countries who arrive in Thailand without a visa will be granted a 30 day stay if they have proof of an onward ticket and adequate funds. Some nationalities will need to pay around 1000 THB for a visa on arrival. A very select few nationalities cannot apply for a visa on arrival. We advise that you contact the Thai embassy or consulate in your country of origins for complete information. For longer stays, a visa should be applied for before departure. You need to enter Thailand within 90 days of the visa being issued, otherwise it will be invalid.

Money

Major credit cards are accepted by hotels and large shops but cash, in the form of the local currency Thai Baht, is the preferred tender elsewhere. Traveller's cheques are not generally accepted outside of hotels, so change them for cash at a bank exchange which you'll find in most tourist spots. ATM's are also widely available and accept most international cards. Several banks have restrictions on ATM card use abroad, thus we advise to verify this with your bank before departure.

Post and telecommunications

The Thai postal service is very reliable and there are also courier services widely available. Calling abroad is easy but expensive. Internet access is available in all major tourist places and you will find WiFi in most cafes in more built up areas.

Transportation

Traffic in Bangkok can be very bad, especially during the rainy season. Using the Metro or Sky Train is by far the fastest and most convenient way to get around. However, these do not cover the entire city. If using a taxi, try to make sure you get one on the meter. Tuk-tuks are another way of getting around. These motorised, three wheel cars tend to be more expensive than meter taxis, and prices are negotiated beforehand.

Motorbike taxis: Travel by motorbike in Thailand is not safe and under no circumstances is this sanctioned or recommended. Please note that travel by motorbike is not usually covered by insurance. Please check the fine print of your travel insurance policy to be sure of your coverage.

Health and Safety

Climate

Thailand has a tropical monsoon climate.

April and May are the hottest months of the year when even the locals complain about the heat.

June sees the beginning of the South West Monsoon, and brings with it the rainy season, which continues intermittently until the end of October.

From November to the end of February, the weather is cooler and less humid.

The North and North-East are generally cooler than Bangkok in the winter and hotter in the summer. In the far north, around Mae Hong Son, temperatures can occasionally drop as low as 20C.

Health and wellbeing

Healthcare in Thailand is some of the best in South East Asia, with most hospitals offering a Western level of service. However, be aware that it can be expensive. Each traveller is responsible for his or her own health. First and foremost, make sure that you have travel insurance for your trip.

Vaccinations

Before travelling to Thailand, please ensure you have adequate protection against disease. Contact your doctor for the latest medical advice on the vaccinations you need, no less than two months before your departure. Be aware that there is malaria risk in rural parts of Thailand.

Travel insurance (compulsory)

We do everything possible to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip. However, travel inevitably involves some risk and this should be recognised by holidaymakers. Travel insurance is a cost effective way of protecting yourself and your equipment should any problems occur such as cancelled trips, delays, medical emergencies, baggage loss or damage. It also gives you peace of mind. Please make sure your travel insurance covers all activities planned on your trip.

Culture & Customs

Etiquette and cultural differences

Experiencing different cultures is one of the joys of travelling, and it is important that these differences are respected. Thailand has cultural norms and taboos which we encourage visitors to understand and abide by.

Try not to get angry. Losing face by shouting or becoming abusive is one of the biggest faux pas in Thailand. It is extremely impolite and unlikely to achieve a positive outcome.

Refrain from public displays of affection, they are considered offensive. It is rare to see couples holding hands. However, it is quite common for friends of the same sex.

It is polite to remove your shoes before entering a house – look for shoes at the front door as a clue.

Thais greet each other with a slight bow and a prayer-like gesture, with the younger or lower-ranked person usually initiating the gesture. For foreigners and business, handshakes are acceptable.

Temple visit etiquette

Foreigners are always welcome in temples. However, it is important that a few simple rules of etiquette are followed:

Dress appropriately and act with the utmost respect when visiting Wats and temples.

Do not wear shorts or tank tops and make sure your shoulders and knees are covered.

Remove your shoes and hat before going into a monastery.

If you sit down in front of the dais (the platform on which the Buddha's are placed), sit with your feet to the side rather than in the lotus position.

Never point your finger or the soles of your feet towards a person or a figure of the Buddha.

A woman may accept something from a monk but should never touch a monk.

Show Respect and turn off mobile phones, remove headphones, lower your voice and avoid inappropriate conversation.

Food and drink

Thailand's cuisine is regarded by many people as some of the best in the world. Rich with citrus, coriander and liberal helpings of fresh chillies, the food has a characteristic tang that many fall in love with. Like all other Buddhist countries, vegetarian food is available in most restaurants.

Here are some popular dishes:

Tom Yum Goong (spicy shrimp soup)

Pad Thai (Thai style fried noodles)

Som Tum (spicy green papaya salad)

Khao Pad (fried rice)

Gaeng Keow Wan Kai (chicken green curry)

Khao Niao Mamuang (sticky rice in coconut milk, served with mango)

Water

It is not advisable to drink tap water in Thailand. Bottled water is recommended but do check the expiry date before opening. Ice is widely used and is produced with treated water.

Public holidays

There are many public holidays in Thailand. The main one is the Thai New Year called Songkran. Songkran is celebrated all over the country, with its highlight in Chiang Mai where celebrations go on for over a week. Many Thai people travel back to their hometowns to visit local temples during this time. Be aware that this can make transportation more difficult. The most notable way of celebrating Songkran is by splashing water on each other. Large water fights break out across the country and innocent bystanders are favoured targets. Store your valuables and electronics carefully!

Helpful tips

Donations and gift giving

Although there is poverty in certain areas of Thailand, please read the following points about donations and gift giving.

Do not give money to people begging, especially children. This reinforces the belief that begging is an acceptable way to make a living. If children make money from begging, their parents are less likely to send them to school. Children working on the streets are also vulnerable to abuse. Giving money and goods to beggars can accentuate an unequal relationship between locals and visitors, with tourists being seen as purely money givers.

Do not give sweets to children in villages that we visit.

Do not feel that you necessarily have to give material things. Sometimes, giving your friendship, time and interest to locals can be the best gift of all.

Tipping

Tipping is a personal matter and travellers are encouraged to tip any amount they feel is appropriate. For your convenience, we have included a suggested tipping guide below:

Bellboy: 10-20 baht per suitcase / bag

Chambermaid: 20 – 40 baht per day

Guides: 100 – 150 baht per day for guides (depending on group size and performance)

Drivers: 100 per day, per person

Restaurants: in smart establishments you may find that the tip is already included in the bill. In local restaurants tips are not expected but you may wish to leave loose change on the table.

Price guide

Generally, things are cheap in Thailand. However as a tourist you will get overcharged if you are not careful. Haggling is considered a sport when it comes to non-food products. Always stay calm and polite and you'll be surprised at the discounts you may get. Be aware that many items for sale on street stands are counterfeit.

Street food

Phad Thai: THB 25 –50

Rice dish: THB 30 – 60

Restaurants

Western dishes: from THB 150

Thai dishes: from THB 80

Drinks

Soft drinks THB 10 – 20

Beer: THB 50 – 70

Fruit juice: THB 20 - 30

Water: THB 10 - 15

Other Items

DVDs (real): THB 100 - 200

SIM card: THB 100

Mobile phone: from THB 1000

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Pre-departure checklist

Travel insurance

Passport with at least six months validity from date of entry

Photocopy of passport

Visa or visa on arrival

Vaccinations

ATM cards/travellers cheques

All relevant tickets Reconfirmed

flights Lightweight clothing

Long-sleeved shirts and trousers (recommended for evenings)

Electrical adaptor: 220V, 50Hz; 2 pin plugs

A small bag/backpack for day and overnight trips

Appropriate shoes for trekking, cycling and walking

Insect repellent

Sunscreen

Medication/first aid kit

Please note: *Domestic airlines impose restrictions on baggage at approx 20kg maximum, so travel lightly where possible. Also be aware that train and boat cabins have limited space.*

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