

Thailand

Mountains, Monks and Meditation



Venture into Northern Thailand to admire ancient wats, glittering temples and extravagant palaces as we embark on a journey of discovery on this 11 day Religious Studies trip. Discover a Thailand rarely seen by outsiders as we join local residents in giving alms to monks, receive meditation instruction in a majestic temple complex and journey to the ancient capital of Thailand, Sukhothai with its dramatic golden sculptures of the Buddha. We will wander through local markets, learn to cook some tasty Thai dishes, get a taste of local life on a hilltribe homestay and visit an elephant sanctuary along the way. Discover the best Thailand has to offer on this spiritual journey to the north.



Recommended itinerary:

Days 1/2: Depart London, arrive Bangkok, Thai dinner We will be met on arrival by our tour leader and transferred to our hotel. After check in we will head out for dinner to experience Thailand's bustling capital. Bangkok is famous for its tuk tuks, klong boats and street vendors serving up delicious Thai food, which we will sample at a local restaurant.

Culture shock rating: 

Physical rating: 

Day 3: Bangkok city tour, Tuk Tuk adventure, Grand Palace After breakfast at our hotel, we will meet our local guide as we start our Bangkok tour by tuk tuk. We will visit the spectacular Grand Palace, undoubtedly the city's most famous landmark, Wat Po, the temple at the centre of the Buddhist religion in Thailand, and the Phahurat Market, in the heart of Bangkok's little India and home to a century old Sikh community. We will also make a visit to the golden-domed Siri Guru Singh Sabha temple. Lunch will be at a local restaurant.

In the afternoon we will head to Wat Mahathat for a meditation class. Wat Mahathat houses the Vipassana Meditation Centre in the majestic setting of the temple complex. The three hour classes consist of an introductory meditation instruction followed by demonstrations of walking and sitting. Please expect to make a small donation as a show of respect and observe five basic Buddhist precepts. You will also be required to wear only white attire during the proceedings, which will be available to rent.

Day 4: Kanchanaburi We will head out of Bangkok travelling west to Kanchanaburi. We will spend time exploring the Jeath War Museum and the Allied War Cemetery. After lunch we will continue to the Hellfire Pass Museum where we can walk through the hand-cut gorge and learn about the arduous lives of POWs working in this district during World War II. We will then board a train on the infamous Thai-Burma railway to take us to the infamous 'Bridge on the River Kwai' The later afternoon has a lighter note as we enjoy a saamlaw (bicycle rickshaw) tour around the town of Kanchanaburi - the perfect way to take in the splendour of this city and the monuments to its tragic past.

Day 5: Ayuthaya This morning, we will travel by bus to Ayuthaya, one of Thailand's ancient cities. There will be time for a guided tour of the picturesque ruins and temples spread across the town; the ruins at Wat Phra Mahathat provide many photo opportunities and the Buddha head surrounded by Banyan tree roots is perhaps the most photographed site in Ayuthaya.

Day 6: Sukhothai We will travel from Ayuthaya to Sukhothai via a stop off at Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat (Phitsanlouke). Today we have a focus on two extensive temple complexes, the first is located on the banks of the Nan River near the Naresuan Bridge. Commonly known as Wat Yai, it is famous throughout Thailand for its golden sculpture of the Buddha called the Phra Buddha Chinnarat which many people in Thailand consider to be the most beautiful Buddha portrait in Thailand.

Sukhothai was once the Thai capital in the 13th century and is now a UNESCO World Heritage site. The province's temples and monuments have been restored and remain protected in the Sukhothai Historical Park. We will spend time viewing the most interesting sights including the Royal Palace and Wat Mahathat.

Day 7: Chiang Mai We drive from Sukhothai to Lampang with a stop to view the Wat Phra That Lampang Luang temple that is said to enshrine a relic of the Buddha. We will have an early lunch before continuing to Chiang Mai, or the 'Rose of the North', a vibrant city in northern Thailand, known for its beauty and the friendliness of the local people.

In the afternoon we will drive up and explore the famous temple complex of Doi Suthep. Drive along a scenic, winding mountain road that ends at an impressive 300-step naga-guarded stairway. The rewards justify the climb with one of the most beautiful temples in Thailand on display, not to mention fantastic panoramic views of the city and the opportunity to listen to hypnotic evening chanting by resident Buddhist monks. Our last stop of the day is to head back into the centre of town and explore the bustling night markets; dinner will be at a local restaurant.

Day 8: Chiang Mai, alms giving & cookery class The day starts early as we jump in a fleet of Songthaew, an iconic public bus. Our first stop will be Kad Ton Payom, a flea market well known for its northern Thai cuisine. Afterwards, we will have the chance to offer alms to monks, to 'make merit' and enjoy a traditional style breakfast.

The next stop is Wat U-mong a 600 year-old temple famed for its large painted pagoda and underground tunnel. Soak up the peaceful atmosphere and perhaps take the opportunity to talk to the abbot about Buddhism and Dharma. Finally we will visit Wat Suan Dok and mingle with monks to learn about their way of life. We will take some time out to learn more about basic meditation, before finishing the adventure by making an offering to the Sangkha.

In the afternoon we will discover some of the secrets of Thai cuisine by joining a cookery course. Learn about the main ingredients used in Thai cuisine, how they are used and stored and what alternatives you can substitute if you can't get them at home. The meal is usually rounded off with a tasting of seasonal Thai fruit.

Day 9: Elephant Nature Park We say goodbye to Chiang Mai and set off by road to the Golden Triangle region. We will make a stop along the way at an elephant camp and see these gentle giants take a morning bath and demonstrate how they were trained to haul timber in the forest. We will observe our herd at play and watch them interact in each of their social groups. After lunch we explore the five interconnected Chiang Dao Caves before arriving at the charming small town of Doi Mae Salong. The region is famous for its Chinese tea traders and you can enjoy a cup of tea in a traditional Chinese tea house overlooking the mountains. We will stay overnight at a local homestay in the picturesque village of Doi Mae Salong.

Day 10: Golden Triangle, Chiang Rai After breakfast we will visit the stunning region known as the Golden Triangle, where the borders of Thailand, Burma and Laos meet. We will enjoy lunch overlooking the mighty Mekong River and then visit the fascinating hall of opium - an exhibition that details this notorious history. In the afternoon, we will climb on board a long-tail boat and travel on the Khong River to the old city of Chiang Saen, the ancient capital of the Lanna Kingdom. On the way, there is a chance to step foot into Laos. This point is famous for the local rice whiskey sold from distilleries on the banks of river. We will stay overnight in Chiang Rai.

Day 11: Chiang Rai, flight to Bangkok & London Today we will visit the Wat Rong Kun, otherwise known as the 'White Temple'. Construction started in 1997, and it is expected to be a work in progress for another 60 to 70 years. Our next stop is the Hilltribe Museum. This is a public-benefit organisation which aims to help educate local and foreign tourists about the Hilltribes' fast disappearing culture. The Museum aims to preserve artifacts and to provide information to tourists and tour operators in order to aid responsible tourism. The Hilltribe Museum is under the supervision of the Population and Community Development Association (PDA). Day rooms will be arranged before transfer to Chiang Rai Airport for our flight back home to Bangkok and on to London.

It is important to realise that the itinerary needs to be flexible. While every effort will be made to follow the above schedule, in the event of political problems, airline schedule changes or natural events, we will do our best to make your trip as enjoyable and hassle-free as possible, but it is important to EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED and be prepared to accept some slight changes. Relax and have faith in your guides.



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