

PLAN YOUR TRIP

YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT
 Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions
 to help you put together your perfect trip

- Welcome to Thailand 2
- 20 Top Experiences 6
- Need to Know 18
- What's New 20
- If You Like 21
- Month by Month 23
- Itineraries 27
- Responsible Travel 34
- Islands & Beaches 40
- Culture & Cuisine 42
- Travel with Children 45
- Regions at a Glance 48



need to know

When to Go

Yearly Daily Budget
 Budget-Low: 1500B
 Budget-Mid: 2000B
 Budget-High: 3000B

High Season
 Nov-Mar
 Hot and dry with little rain. Peak season for tourists.

Shoulder Season
 Apr-Jun
 Hot and dry with some rain. Good time to visit.

Low Season
 Jul-Oct
 Hot and wet with heavy rain. Fewer tourists.

Language
 Thai

Currency
 Baht

Yearly Daily Budget
 Budget-Low: 1500B
 Budget-Mid: 2000B
 Budget-High: 3000B

The Best Time
 3000B

Secret Spots
 Discover hidden gems and off-the-beaten-path locations.



UNDERSTAND THAILAND

GET MORE FROM YOUR TRIP
 Learn about the big picture, so you
 can make sense of what you see

- Thailand Today 696
- History & Politics 699
- The People & Culture 721
- Eating in Thailand 738
- The Sex Industry in Thailand 746
- Environment & Wildlife 749

The Military

The military is a powerful force in Thailand. It has played a significant role in the country's history and politics. The military is a well-trained and equipped force that is capable of handling a wide range of situations.

1990
 The military was reformed and modernized.

1995
 The military was reformed and modernized.

1998
 The military was reformed and modernized.

2001
 The military was reformed and modernized.

2004
 The military was reformed and modernized.

2007
 The military was reformed and modernized.

2010
 The military was reformed and modernized.

2013
 The military was reformed and modernized.

2016
 The military was reformed and modernized.

2019
 The military was reformed and modernized.

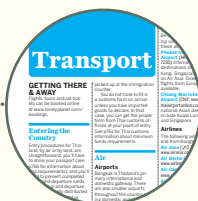
population per sq km

Country	Population per sq km
Thailand	~32 people
USA	~37 people
UK	~280 people





Directory A–Z	756
Transport	768
Health	777
Language	784
Index	801
Map Legend	814



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

China Williams,
Mark Beales, Tim Bower, Celeste Brush, Austin Bush,
Alan Murphy, Brandon Presser

➤ **Every listing is recommended by our authors, and their favourite places are listed first**

➤ **Look out for these icons:**



Our author's top recommendation



A green or sustainable option

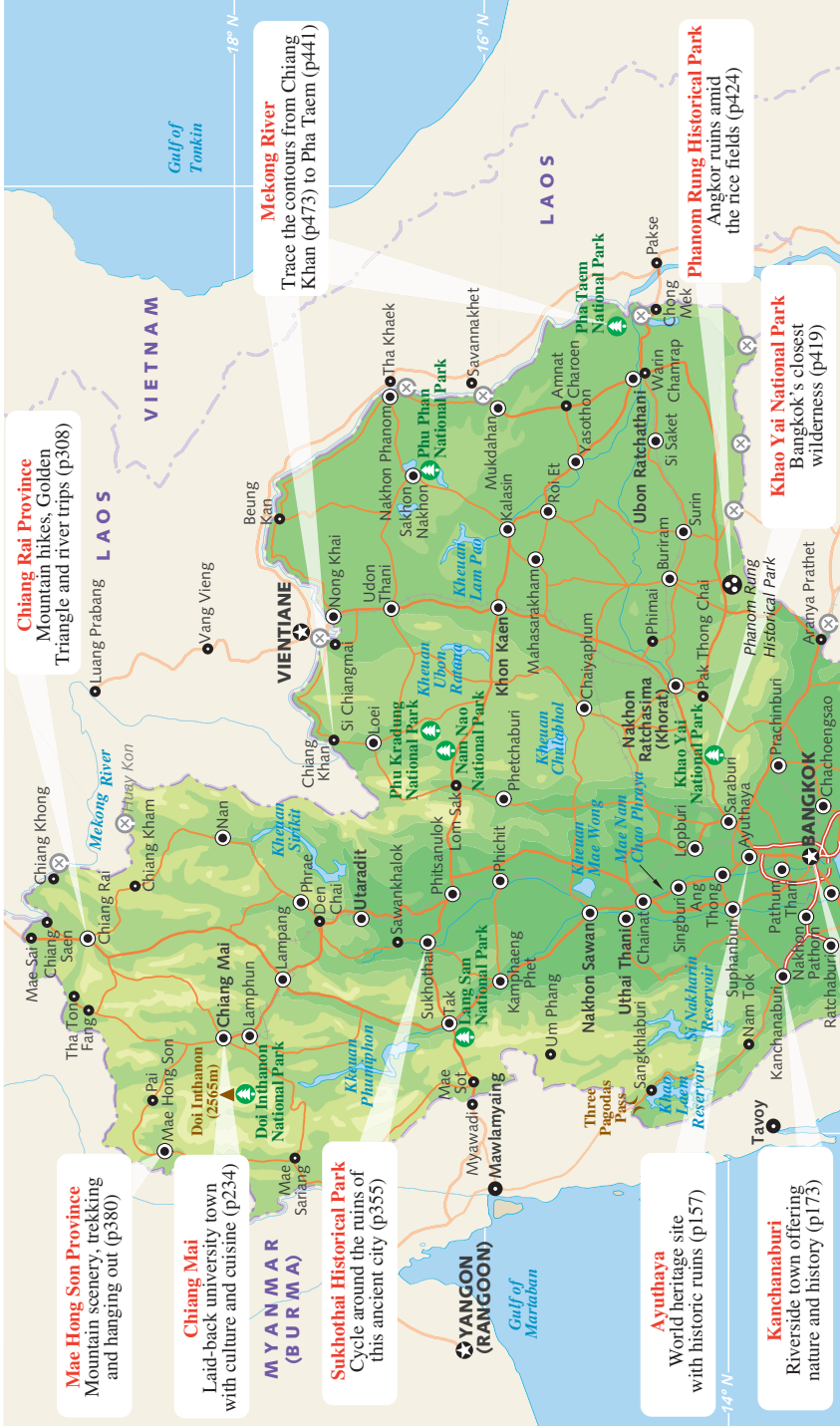


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BANGKOK	54	SOUTHERN CHIANG MAI PROVINCE	290	Mae Sariang	402
AROUND BANGKOK	152	Bo Sang & San Kamphaeng	290	NORTHEASTERN THAILAND	406
Amphawa	153	Mae Kamphong	290	Nakhon Ratchasima (Khorat)	410
Nakhon Pathom	155	Doi Inthanon National Park	291	Phimai	417
CENTRAL THAILAND	156	NORTHERN THAILAND	294	Khao Yai National Park	419
Ayuthaya	157	Lamphun	298	BURIRAM PROVINCE	423
Lopburi	168	Lampang	300	Nang Rong	423
Kanchanaburi	173	Around Lampang	306	Phanom Rung Historical Park	424
Thong Pha Phum	187	Chiang Rai	308	SURIN & SI SAKET PROVINCE	427
Sangkhlaburi	188	Mae Salong (Santikhiri)	317	Surin	427
KO CHANG & EASTERN SEABOARD	191	Mae Sai	320	Si Saket	431
Si Racha	194	Chiang Saen	325	UBON RATCHATHANI PROVINCE	433
Ko Si Chang	196	Sop Ruak	328	Ubon Ratchathani	433
Pattaya	197	Chiang Khong	330	CHAIYAPHUM PROVINCE	443
Rayong & Ban Phe	204	Phayao	334	Chaiyaphum	443
Ko Samet	205	Phrae	336	KHON KAEN PROVINCE	445
Chanthaburi	210	Nan	341	Khon Kaen	446
Trat	213	Phitsanulok	348	UDON THANI PROVINCE	454
Ko Chang	216	Sukhothai	355	Udon Thani	454
Ko Wai	228	Kamphaeng Phet	366	NONG KHAI PROVINCE	461
Ko Mak	228	TAK PROVINCE	370	Nong Khai	462
Ko Kut	230	Mae Sot	370	West of Nong Khai	468
CHIANG MAI PROVINCE	232	Mae Sot to Um Phang	375	LOEI PROVINCE	470
CHIANG MAI	234	Um Phang & Around	375	Loei	471
NORTHERN CHIANG MAI PROVINCE	284	Mae Sot to Mae Sariang	379	Chiang Khan	473
Mae Sa Valley & Samoeng	284	MAE HONG SON PROVINCE	380	Phu Reua National Park	476
Chiang Dao	284	Mae Hong Son	380	Dan Sai	476
Doi Ang Khang	286	Pai	388		
Fang & Tha Ton	287	Soppong	398		
		Khun Yuam	401		

On the Road

Tham Erawan	479	Prachuap Khiri Khan	526	Ko Yao	620
Phu Kradueng National Park	479	Ban Krut & Bang Saphan Yai	530	PHUKET ISLAND	622
BUENG KAN PROVINCE	479	Chumphon	531	Phuket Town	627
Bueng Kan	479	KO SAMUI & THE LOWER GULF . . . 535		Ko Sireh	633
Ban Ahong	480	Ko Samui	538	Rawai	633
Wat Phu Tok	480	Ko Pha-Ngan	556	Hat Kata	634
Ban Kham Pia	481	Ko Tao	571	Hat Karon	637
NAKHON PHANOM PROVINCE	481	Ang Thong Marine National Park	586	Hat Patong	638
Nakhon Phanom	481	Surat Thani	587	Hat Kamala	644
Renu Nakhon	485	Ao Khanom	589	Hat Surin	645
That Phanom	485	Nakhon Si Thammarat	591	Ao Bang Thao	646
SAKON NAKHON PROVINCE	487	Songkhla & Around	593	Sirinat National Park	648
Sakon Nakhon	487	Hat Yai	594	Khao Phra Taew Royal Wildlife & Forest Reserve	649
Phu Phan Mountains	491	DEEP SOUTH	595	Thalang District	650
MUKDAHAN PROVINCE	492	Yala	595	KRABI PROVINCE	650
Mukdahan	492	Pattani	598	Krabi Town	650
YASOTHON & ROI ET PROVINCES	496	Narathiwat	599	Ao Nang	653
Yasothon	496	Sungai Kolok	600	Railay	657
Roi Et	498	PHUKET & THE ANDAMAN COAST . . . 602		Ko Phi-Phi Don	662
SA KAEW PROVINCE	502	Ranong Town	603	Ko Phi-Phi Leh	668
Aranya Prathet	501	Ko Chang	607	Ko Jum & Ko Si Boya	668
Sa Kaew	502	Ko Phayam	608	Ko Lanta	669
HUA HIN & THE SOUTHERN GULF . . . 503		Laem Son National Park	609	TRANG PROVINCE	676
Phetchaburi (Phetburi)	505	Khao Sok National Park	611	Trang Town	676
Cha-am	510	Khao Lak & Around	612	Trang Beaches	679
Hua Hin	512	Surin Islands Marine National Park	616	Trang Islands	680
Pranburi & Around	522	Similan Islands Marine National Park	617	SATUN PROVINCE	684
Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park	524	Phang-Nga Town & Ao Phang-Nga	618	Pak Bara	684
				Ko Bulon Leh	685
				Ko Tarutao Marine National Park	686
				Ko Adang & Ko Rawi	692
				Satun	692



Mae Hong Son Province
Mountain scenery, trekking with culture and cuisine (p380)

Chiang Mai
Laid-back university town with culture and cuisine (p234)

Sukhothai Historical Park
Cycle around the ruins of this ancient city (p355)

Ayutthaya
World heritage site with historic ruins (p157)

Kanchanaburi
Riverside town offering nature and history (p173)

Chiang Rai Province
Mountain hikes, Golden Triangle and river trips (p308)

Mekong River
Trace the contours from Chiang Khan (p473) to Pha Taem (p441)

Phanom Rung Historical Park
Angkor ruins amid the rice fields (p424)

Khao Yai National Park
Bangkok's closest wilderness (p419)



Bangkok

Mega-city for mega fun (p54)

Hua Hin

Beaches fit for a king (p512)

Khao Sok National Park

Land-before-time jungle (p611)

Surin & Similan Islands Marine National Parks

Famed Andaman diving (p616)

Phuket

International beach resort (p622)

Ko Lanta

A beach bum's best friend (p669)

Ko Samet

Bangkok's beach playground (p205)

Ko Tao

The dive-master's island (p571)

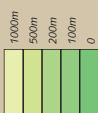
Ko Pha-Ngan

Hammock-hangers' beach (p556)

Ko Samui

Beach resort for holiday pop ins (p538)

ELEVATION



SOUTH CHINA SEA

GULF OF THAILAND

INDIAN OCEAN

VIETNAM

Mekong River

CAMBODIA

Angkor Wat

PHNOM PENH

HO CHI MINH CITY (SAIGON)

Malaysia

Kota Bharu

Langkawi

Phuket

Ko Lanta

Surin

Phuket

106° E

104° E

58° E

6° N

12° N

10° N

8° N



Celeste Brash

Phuket & the Andaman Coast Celeste first arrived in Thailand as a student of Thai language, history and culture at Chiang Mai University. She's come back to the country many times since and has done the gamut from wild nights on Ko Phang-Ngan to weeks of silence at Wat Suanmuk. Her award-winning travel stories have appeared in *Travelers' Tales* books and she's been published in a slew of newspapers and magazines from the *LA Times* to *Islands* magazine. Celeste

has lost count of how many Lonely Planet guides she's contributed to but her heart is irrevocably stuck on Southeast Asia, and Thailand is her first love. When not dragging her husband and two children to exotic places, she and her family live in Portland, Oregon. Find her on the web at www.celestebrash.com.

Read more about Celeste at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/Celeste



Austin Bush

Bangkok, Northern Thailand, Deep South section, Eating in Thailand Austin came to Thailand in 1998 on a language scholarship at Chiang Mai University. The lure of city life and a need for employment and spicy food eventually led Austin to Bangkok. And city life, employment and spicy food have managed to keep him there since. But escaping Bangkok, particularly for the mountains of Northern Thailand, is one of his favourite things about contributing to this par-

ticular guide. A native of Oregon and a freelance writer and photographer who often focuses on food, samples of Austin's work can be seen at www.austinbushphotography.com.

Read more about Austin at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/Austin



Alan Murphy

Chiang Mai Province Alan discovered Southeast Asia sometime in the mid-1990s when he travelled extensively around the region. Since then he has returned to live and work as a volunteer in Chiang Mai, advocating for the rights of migrant workers around the Mekong region. Among other journalistic endeavours, Alan has written and updated guidebooks for Lonely Planet since 1999, and loves the opportunity to get under the skin of a new destination. This was his first time

working on the *Thailand* guide and he was very happy to be assigned Chiang Mai – a city with a real heart and a fantastic diversity of people. It seems more like home every time he returns.

Read more about Alan at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/Alan



Brandon Presser

Ko Samui & the Lower Gulf, part of Responsible Travel chapter Growing up in a land where bear hugs are taken literally, this wanderlust-y Canadian always craved swaying palms and golden sand. A trek across Southeast Asia as a teenager was the clincher — he was hooked, returning year after year to scuba dive, suntan, and savour spoonfuls of spicy *sôm-dam* (spicy papaya salad). After leaving his job at the Louvre, Brandon picked up his pen and rucksack, and became a

full-time freelance travel writer. He's since contributed to over 20 Lonely Planet titles from *Iceland* to *Thailand* and many 'lands' in between.

Read more about Brandon at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/Brandon



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



China Williams

Coordinating Author, Hua Hin & the Southern Gulf, Ko Chang & Eastern Sea-

board Oh Thailand, it appears we're growing old together. China first came to Thailand to teach English in Surin way back in 1997, a few months prior to the country's currency crisis. Since then she has shuttled across the Pacific to work on various Thailand guidebooks for nine years. This is her third trip with her son, who is now four years old. Be assured that all the beaches in the upper gulf and

eastern seaboard have been kid-tested and mother-approved, including the wholesome bits of prostitute-city Pattaya. China lives in Catonsville, Maryland (USA) with her husband, Matt, and son, Felix.

Read more about China at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/China



Mark Beales

Central Thailand After receiving a scholarship to study journalism, Mark worked as a reporter for 13 years. In 2004 he swapped the chilly shores of England for the sunnier coasts of Thailand. As well as being a freelance writer, Mark has worked as a teacher and TV presenter. Highlights on this trip included waking up to a giant hornbill attempting to prise open the door of his tree-top cabin and meeting an impossibly cute one-day-old elephant in Ayuthaya. When Mark isn't

on the road, he teaches English at an international school in Rayong. For more on Mark's work, visit www.markbeales.com.

Read more about Mark at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/Mark



Tim Bower

Northeastern Thailand While growing up, Tim didn't travel much except for the obligatory pilgrimage to Disney World and an annual summer week at the lake. He's spent most of his adult life making up for this, and has since visited more than 70 countries, including most of those in Southeast Asia. After university he worked as a legislative assistant before quitting to backpack around West Africa. It was during this trip that he decided to become a freelance travel writer and photographer, and he's been at it ever since. When he isn't shouldering a backpack somewhere he lives in Khon

Kaen, Thailand, where he jointly runs the Isan Explorer (www.isanexplorer.com) tour company.

Read more about Tim at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/Tim

OVER MORE PAGE WRITERS

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itineraries

Whether you've got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travellers.



Two Weeks Just A Quickie

Even if you're only doing a Thailand 'pop-in', you can still pack in a full itinerary thanks to the affordability of domestic flights. Start off in **Bangkok** and then fly to the tropical beach resorts of **Ko Samui** or **Phuket**. Although both are international superstars, there are plenty of quiet corners if needed, and beaches with personalities to suit every sand hunter. If you find yourself on a spot that fits like a wet bathing suit, shop around the island before plotting your escape route to the next destination.

Once you've tired of sand and sun, fly up to **Chiang Mai** for a Thai cooking class and temple-spotting. Then explore the surrounding countryside filled with mountainous road trips and hill-tribe trekking. Pay homage to Thailand's highest peak at **Doi Inthanon National Park**.

Return to Bangkok with a tan, a Thai recipe book and lots of travel tales for the water cooler.



One Month Essential Thailand

If you've got a month to wander through Thailand, spend a few days in **Bangkok**, adjusting to the heat and the chaos, and then take the train north stopping in the ancient capital of **Ayuthaya**, where Thailand built a small regional empire. Make a brief detour to the monkey town of **Lopburi**. And then follow the culture trail north to **Sukhothai**, where you can cycle through the historic and crumbling ruins of one of Thailand's first kingdoms. Hightail it to **Chiang Mai**, made up of a delightful collection of old Lanna architecture, youthful cafes and easygoing living. A week may pass before you get itchy feet. Mountains await in either direction from Chiang Mai. Go northwest for the hippie scene in **Pai**. Follow the mountain ridge through the misty morning to **Mae Hong Son**, for a slice of Shan culture and low-key trekking tours. And follow the loop road through little dusty towns to return to Chiang Mai.

By now the beach is calling so transit back through Bangkok and then on to the classic Gulf of Thailand stops: **Ko Pha-Ngan** for beach bumming and partying and **Ko Tao** for deep-sea diving and snorkelling.

Hop over to the Andaman Coast to see those famous postcard views of limestone mountains jutting out of the sea. **Ko Phi-Phi** is the prettiest (and one of the priciest) of them all but **Ko Lanta** has the quintessential beach vibe and a thriving dive scene. Rock climbers opt for nearby **Krabi**. On the way back north detour through the rainforests of **Khao Sok National Park**.

Transit again through Bangkok to dip your toes into the northeast, the agricultural heartland. Crawl through the jungles of **Khao Yai National Park**. Then head to **Nakhon Ratchasima** (Khorat), a transit point for trips to the Angkor ruins at **Phimai** and the pottery village of **Dan Kwian**. Follow the Khmer trail east to **Phanom Rung**, the most important and visually impressive of the Angkor temples in Thailand. Surrounding Phanom Rung are a handful of smaller more remote temples known for their regal but forgotten ambiance.



Two to Three Weeks

Southern Islands & Beaches

If your bragging buddies back home have sent you to Thailand with a long list of must-see beaches, then prepare for a marathon beach binge. From Bangkok, dip south into **Hua Hin**, for wide sandy beaches and city amenities, and to **Prachuap Khiri Khan**, a mellow seaside town sheltered from the tourist crowds. Then slide down to **Chumphon** to island hop. Swim with the fishes in **Ko Tao**, howl at the full moon in **Ko Pha-Ngan** or hang-out with the bronzing bodies in **Ko Samui**.

Cross the peninsula to imbibe on the Andaman resort island of **Phuket** or pop over to mellow **Ko Yao** to rock climb the limestone mountains or just smile at the scenery. Scramble up or paddle around **Krabi's** scenic missile-shaped peaks planted in the sea. **Ko Phi-Phi** is a party-hard pretty girl and **Ko Lanta** is a kick-back island idyll. **Ko Jum** has a lot of nothing, a perfect perk these days.

The **Trang Islands** are an up-and-comer with karst scenery and cerulean seas. Time is getting tight but you might be able to squeeze in one last stop at **Ko Lipe**, that last grip of beach party mayhem this side of the Andaman.



Two to Three Weeks Northern Thailand

Climb into the bosom of lush mountains and the ethnic minority villages that cling to the border of Thailand, Myanmar and Laos.

Chiang Mai is an ideal base for northern culture and exploration with a menu of meditation, language and massage courses on offer. Follow the northwest spur to **Pai**, a mountain retreat with daytime strolls and night-time carousing. Next is **Soppong**, a mecca for caving. Continue to **Mae Hong Son** to immerse yourself in a remote region more akin to Burma than Bangkok. The last stop along the route is at **Mae Sariang**, a small riverside town developing a good reputation for sustainable trekking tours.

Return to civilisation in Chiang Mai and plot your next campaign towards Chiang Rai. More mountains await northwards in **Chiang Dao**, a sober alternative to Pai. Then take the backdoor to Chiang Rai through **Fang** and zigzagging up the mountain ridge to **Mae Salong**, a Yunnanese tea settlement. Slide into **Chiang Rai** for a hill-tribe homestay and culturally sensitive treks and continue on to the formerly infamous Golden Triangle towns of **Chiang Saen** and **Sop Ruak**. Bypass the crowds with a stop in **Phayao**, a pleasant northern town for temple-spotting, before returning to Chiang Mai.

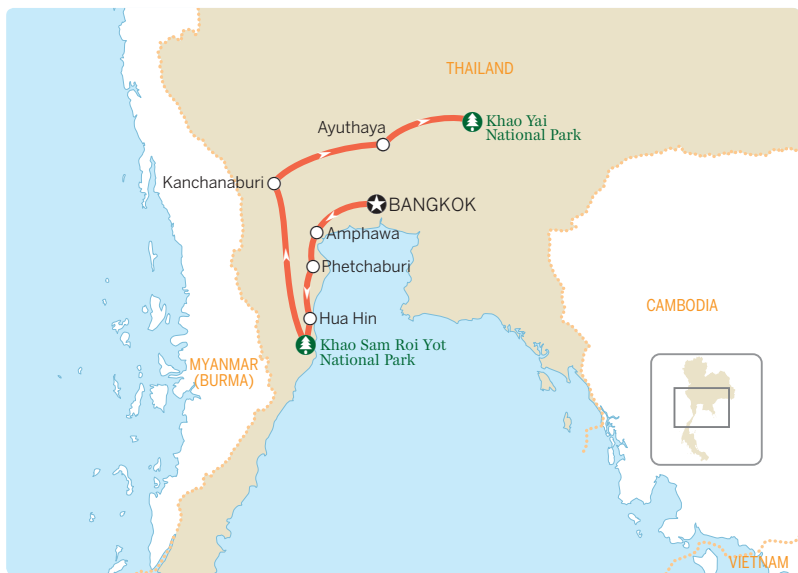


One to Two Weeks Mekong River

There aren't a lot of big-ticket attractions in Thailand's rural northeast (known as Isan) but cultural chameleons will find an old-fashioned way of life, easygoing people and interesting homestays that mix lodging with lounging around the rice fields. The most scenic route through the region is along the Mekong River, which divides Thailand and Laos. The border towns barely recognise the boundary and often share more cultural attributes with their foreign neighbours than with Bangkok.

Start in the charming town of **Nong Khai**, a rock-skipping throw from Laos and an easy border-crossing point. If the pace here is too fast, follow the river road east to **Bueng Kan**, a dusty speck of a town with a nearby temple built on a rocky outcrop and several neighbouring homestays with forays into wild-elephant territory. Pass through **Nakhon Phanom** for its picturesque river promenade and tiny **That Phanom**, with its famous Lao-style temple, honoured with a vibrant 10-day festival in January/February.

For a little urban Isan, check out **Ubon Ratchathani**, surrounded by the **Pha Taem National Park**, river rapids and handicraft villages. From here you can exit into Laos at Pakse or catch an overnight train to Bangkok.



One to Two Weeks

Bangkok & Around

If you're pressed for time or don't want to waste time travelling, there is an amazing diversity of sites within 150km of Bangkok. Take the backdoor route aboard a scenic commuter rail line out of Bangkok to **Amphawa**, a canal-crossed community that hosts a floating market beloved by foodie Thais. Appreciate history away from the capital's hectic streets in **Phetchaburi**, once a royal retreat with a hilltop palace and fascinating cave shrines. Then rest and recreate in **Hua Hin** and the long and sandy coastline that stretches south all the way to **Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park** with its collection of interior karst mountains and mangrove swamps.

Backtrack north to **Kanchanaburi**, which played a minor but well-memorialised role in WWII. The forested mountains to the northwest are ideal for a variety of outdoor adventures. Skirt around the present-day capital to the once-glorious capital of **Ayuthaya** for a Thai history lesson. Then catch the train to **Khao Yai National Park**, for one last foray into nature's jungle before returning to Bangkok's concrete jungle.



- » (above) Beach scene, Ko Lipe (p687)
- » (left) Elephant trekking, Chiang Mai Province (p232)

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