



Chiang Mai Province

Includes →

Chiang Mai	231
Mae Sa Valley & Samoeng	279
Chiang Dao	281
Doi Ang Khang	283
Fang & Tha Ton	284
Bo Sang & San Kamphaeng	286
Mae Kampong	287
Hang Dong & Ban Thawai	288
Doi Inthanon National Park.....	289

Best Places to Eat

- Kow Soy Siri Soy (p263)
- Pun Pun (p267)
- Salsa Kitchen (p268)
- New Delhi (p265)
- Chiang Dao Nest (p283)

Best Places to Stay

- Villa Duang Champa (p257)
- Awanahouse (p256)
- Riverside House (p261)
- Sakulchai (p261)
- Baan Orapin (p261)

Why Go?

The province of Chiang Mai, with its mist-shrouded mountains and temple-filled capital city, has long been a darling on the travellers' trail. The laid-back city of Chiang Mai is an endearing mix of old and new: the moated, partially walled old quarter shelters celebrated temples that reflect the forest-inspired aesthetics of the bygone teak trade and the ethnic mixing pot born during the caravan era. A traveller-friendly scene caters to the party set, the holiday learner, families and sightseers. There's something for everybody, and many decide to call the city home for as long as possible.

Just a short jaunt outside of the city is a stunning landscape of rural farms, forested mountains and minority villages. Two of Thailand's highest peaks – Doi Inthanon (2565m) and Doi Chiang Dao (2195m) – are a few hours' drive out of Chiang Mai. And the province's extensive forest cover provides plenty of athletic escapes.

When to Go

- The weather in Chiang Mai is best for travel during the cool season, roughly from November to February, when temperatures are mild and rain is scarce.
- The hot season, from March until June, is just that and hazy from agricultural fires.

CHIANG MAI

POP 200,000

เชียงใหม่

Nestled into the foothills of northern Thailand, Chiang Mai is a sanctuary. The pace is laid-back, the accoutrements are international and the landscape is picturesque. It is a fine urban specimen with a much-celebrated traditional culture ideal for sightseers, nature buffs and city connoisseurs.

The Lanna kings who ruled the north from ancient Chiang Mai built a moated quarter filled with a multitude of temples. These houses of worship are adorned with mirrored mosaics, tinkling bells and gabled rooftops soaring skyward as if in communication with the heavens. Wandering around these sacred spaces you'll find art, architecture and enlightenment, as many offer monk chats and meditation courses to tourists who are willing to do more than just look.

Beyond the historic centre is a dynamic and modern place with lots of down-to-earth charm. Bangkok refugees, artists, international NGO-workers and hip university students mix together, carving out creative spaces amid Thailand's ubiquitous concrete shophouses, many of which are being abandoned for the spacious suburbs. Head down to Th Nimmanhaemin and you'll glimpse the city's future movers and shakers, intent now on moving and shaking it in the night-clubs and bars.

Maintaining an ever-watchful pose over the metropolis, the mountains of Doi Suthep and Doi Pui are constant and scenic reminders of the city's mythical beginnings. A journey from the steamy plains into the mountains' cloud belt is a winding and meditative escape.

The city can easily consume a week with sightseeing, holiday courses, outdoor activities and, of course, eating. Cuisine specialties of the city include sushi bars around the university, Myanmar curries, Thai street food and vegetarian health food.

History

Chiang Mai and Thailand's other northern provinces share more of their early development with the Shan state of present-day Myanmar, neighbouring parts of Laos and even the southern mountains of China than with Bangkok and Thailand's central plains.

King Phaya Mengrai (also spelt Mangrai) is credited for founding the Lanna kingdom in Chiang Saen and expanding it into the

Ping River valley. Once he reached the valley, he built a temporary capital at Wiang Kum Kam. Around 1296, King Mengrai relocated the Lanna capital to a more picturesque spot between Doi Suthep and the Ping River and named the auspicious city Nopburi Si Nakhon Ping Chiang Mai (shortened to Chiang Mai, meaning the 'New Walled City'). Traces of the original 1296 earthen ramparts can still be seen today along Th Kamphaeng Din in Chiang Mai.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, the Lanna kingdom expanded as far south as Kamphaeng Phet and as far north as Luang Prabang in Laos. During this time, Chiang Mai became an important religious and cultural centre, and the eighth world synod of Theravada Buddhism was held here in 1477.

The Lanna kingdom was soon confronted by challenges from Ayuthaya, the powerful city-state that had flourished in Thailand's central plains and that would later consolidate the region under Siamese control and help shape the broader 'Thai' identity. But it was Myanmar that would overtake the city and the kingdom in 1556, an occupation that lasted 200 years.

The fall of Ayuthaya in 1767 to Myanmar marked another turning point in Chiang Mai's history. The defeated Thai army reunited under Phraya Taksin south of Ayuthaya in present-day Bangkok and began a campaign to push out the occupying forces from Myanmar. Chao Kavila, a chieftain (known as *jôw meu-ang*) from nearby Lampang principality, helped 'liberate' northern Thailand from Myanmar control, which led to the eventual integration of the Lanna kingdom into the expanding Thai kingdom based in Bangkok.

Under Kavila, Chiang Mai became an important regional trade centre. In 1800 Kavila built the monumental brick walls around Chiang Mai's inner city and expanded the city in southerly and easterly directions, establishing a river port at the end of what is today Th Tha Phae (*tha phae* means 'raft pier'). Many of the later Shan- and Burmese-style temples were built by wealthy teak merchants who emigrated from Myanmar during this period.

There were many political and technological factors that ultimately led to the demise of an independent Lanna state. The Bangkok-based government designated Chiang Mai as an administrative unit in 1892 during the expansion of colonial rule in neighbour-