



Northeastern Thailand

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Ban Kham Pia (p475)
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Why Go?

For travellers and Thais alike, the northeast is Thailand's forgotten backyard. Isan (*ee-săhn*), as it's called, offers a glimpse of the Thailand of old: rice fields run to the horizon, water buffalo wade in muddy ponds, silk weavers work looms under their homes, and pedal-rickshaw drivers pull passengers down city streets. If you have a penchant for authentic experiences, it will surely be satisfied here.

Spend even a little time in this colossal corner of the country and you'll discover as many differences as similarities to the rest of Thailand. The language, food and culture are more Lao than Thai, with hearty helpings of Khmer and Vietnamese thrown into the mix. And spend time here you should, because it's home to some of Thailand's best historic sites, national parks and festivals. Thailand's tourist trail is at its bumpiest here (English is rarely spoken), but the fantastic attractions and daily interactions could end up being highlights of your entire trip.

When to Go

- ➔ Only 1% of foreign travellers who come to Thailand visit Isan, so you don't need to worry about high and low seasons.
- ➔ The relatively cool dry season from November through February is the most comfortable time to visit, and the Surin Elephant Round-up in November is one festival worth planning your travels around.
- ➔ As the hot season (March to May, when temperatures can climb over 40°C) comes to a close, towns and villages across the region, most famously Yasothon, launch giant homemade rockets into the sky to call for rain.
- ➔ Isan is at its most beautiful during the rainy season (June to October) when the forests and rice paddies turn green and the waterfalls run wild. Dan Sai's Phi Ta Khon Festival (June) and Ubon Ratchathani's Candle Parade (July) attract hordes of Thai tourists.

North-eastern Thailand Highlights

- 1 Getting awestruck by the scenery in **Pha Taem National Park** (p440)
- 2 Having a blast at a **Rocket Festival**
- 3 Looking for elephants, tigers, pythons, monkeys and more in **Khao Yai National Park** (p419)
- 4 Stepping back in time at the restored Angkor-era temple complexes of **Phanom Rung Historical Park** (p423) and **Phimai** (p417)
- 5 Climbing the rickety walkways up the mountain at **Wat Phu Tok** (p475)
- 6 Travelling along the **Mekong River**.
- 7 Making friends with elephants in **Ban Ta Kiang** (p429)
- 8 Eating *sôm-dam* (spicy papaya salad) and drinking *lôw kôw* (rice whisky) with the locals
- 9 Succumbing to the surreal at **Wat Pa Non Sawan** (p492)

