



Northern Thailand

66 / POP 66.7 MILLION (THAILAND)

Includes ➔

Bangkok.....	361
Ko Samet.....	391
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Nong Khai.....	410
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Sukhothai.....	434
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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ nahm (p379)
- ➔ Khao Soi Lam Duan (p426)
- ➔ Bao Pradit (p409)
- ➔ Larp Khom Huay Poo (p434)
- ➔ Phu-Talay (p398)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Villa Duang Champa (p424)
- ➔ Keereeta Resort (p398)
- ➔ Loy La Long (p374)
- ➔ Kham Pia Homestay (p414)
- ➔ Boklua View (p443)

Why Go?

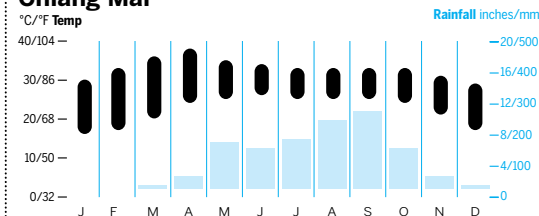
Thailand is arguably the 'safest' introduction to Southeast Asia, but this doesn't mean it represents any sort of compromise. In fact, we suspect that the secret of Thailand's popularity, in particular that of its northern half, is that it packs a bit of everything.

Bangkok is one of the most vibrant cities in Southeast Asia, yet if contemporary Thai living is not your thing, you can delve into the country's past at historical parks such as those at Sukhothai or Phanom Rung. Similarly, fresh-air fiends will be satiated by upcountry expeditions ranging from a rafting expedition in Nan to the cliff-top views from Ubon Ratchathani's Pha Taem National Park. And culture junkies can get their fix at a homestay in the country's northeast or via a trek in northern Thailand.

And lest we forget: Thailand also functions as a convenient gateway to Cambodia and Laos. What's not to love?

When to Go

Chiang Mai



Nov-Feb

Thailand's 'winter' is the best time to visit.

Mar-Jun

The least desirable time to visit is during Thailand's hot season.

Late Jun-Oct

Expect monsoon rains; storms are usually confined to an hour's downpour.

AT A GLANCE

- ➔ **Currency** baht (฿)
- ➔ **Language** Thai
- ➔ **Money** ATMs widespread, charge a 150฿ foreign-account fee; Visa and MasterCard accepted at upmarket places
- ➔ **Visas** Not required for citizens of EU, Australia or USA
- ➔ **Mobile phones** Get inexpensive pre-paid SIM cards for GSM phones; 3G available

Fast Facts

- ➔ **Area (Thailand)** 513,000 sq km
- ➔ **Capital** Bangkok
- ➔ **Country code** 66
- ➔ **Emergency** 191

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	29฿
Cambodia	10,000r	80฿
Euro Zone	€1	45฿
Laos	10,000K	41฿
UK	UK£1	54฿
USA	US\$1	33฿
Vietnam	10,000d	15฿

Set Your Budget

- ➔ **Midrange hotel room** from 600฿
- ➔ **Two-course evening meal** from 150฿
- ➔ **Museum entrance** from 100฿
- ➔ **Small bottle of beer** from 60฿

Connections

Bangkok is one of Southeast Asia's most important air hubs, and has frequent air links to multiple destinations in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Several of Thailand's larger provincial capitals also offer air links to neighbouring countries.

Bus, minivan and train links from Bangkok and eastern, northern and northeastern Thailand lead to numerous land (or sometimes river) border crossings with Cambodia and Laos. Several larger Thai cities (including Bangkok and Chiang Mai) also offer bus links direct to various cities in Cambodia and Laos.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Bangkok is the most likely place to land after a long-haul international flight and is the easiest place to arrange onward travel. Give yourself a couple of days to adjust by exploring the sights in the old royal district of **Ko Ratanakosin** and loading up on souvenirs at the Chatuchak Weekend Market. Experience the urban side of northern Thailand in **Chiang Mai** or **Chiang Rai**. Alternatively, escape cities altogether with a side trip to the beaches of **Ko Chang** or the 'Golden Triangle' village of **Mae Salong**; the former has the advantage of being a skip away from the Cambodian border at **Hat Lek**, while the latter puts you in prime position to cross to Laos at **Chiang Khong**.

Two Weeks

With more time, extend your visit to Thailand's north via a culture- or nature-based excursion such as a trek to the hill-tribe villages that surround **Pai** or a visit to remote **Doi Phu Kha National Park** in Nan. Alternatively, consider a spin through **northeast Thailand**, the country's most traditional rice-growing region. Visit the Khmer ruins at **Phanom Rung** and **Phimai**. Savour the riverine landscape around the parks that make up the **Emerald Triangle** and follow the Mekong River in reverse to laid-back **Nong Khai** before crossing to Laos or Cambodia.

Internet Resources

- ➔ **Tourism Authority of Thailand** (TAT; www.tourismthailand.org) National tourism department.
- ➔ **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com/thailand) Country profile and what to do and see.
- ➔ **Bangkok Post** (www.bangkokpost.com) English-language daily.
- ➔ **Thai Travel Blogs** (www.thaitravelblogs.com) Thailand-based travel blogger.