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Thailand

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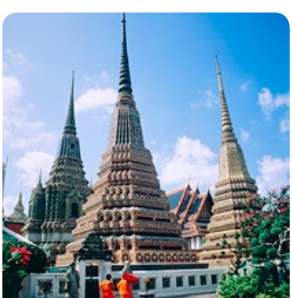

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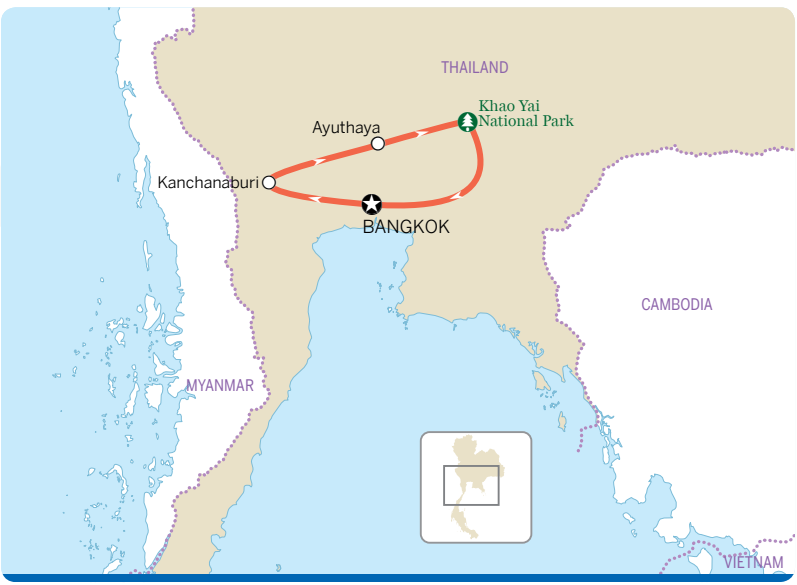
Itineraries



1 WEEK Bangkok & Around

If time is not on your side, you can still explore jungles, temples and Thai culture – they are all within easy reach of **Bangkok**.

After a quick look around the capital's major temples and markets and hitting its top restaurants, embark on the wonderfully scenic train ride to **Kanchanaburi**. Here, enjoy a dip in the seven-tiered Erawan waterfall before visiting the Hellfire Pass Memorial, a poignant tribute to the thousands of prisoners of war who died making the Death Railway during WWII. Nearby forests are ideal for short hikes or adventure activities, such as ziplining over the forest canopies or giving elephants a bath in the River Kwai.

Next, jump in a minivan bound for **Ayuthaya** and cycle around the impressive ruins of this erstwhile capital. Finally, head over to **Khao Yai National Park** (transiting through Pak Chong). Spend a day hiking through the jungle in search of elephants and tigers and a night camping under the stars before winding your way back to Bangkok.

2 WEEKS

Thailand's Highlights

Thanks to expanded domestic air travel in the kingdom, you can zip from the mountains to the city to the beach with ease.

Start off in **Bangkok**, where you can master the public transit system, visit the gleaming temples of Wat Phra Kaew and Wat Pho, explore the shopping centres and party like a rock star. Getting lost in Bangkok is an under-appreciated pastime and neighbourhoods like Chinatown have people-packed streets where you'll see the weird and the wonderful.

Fly (or take the scenic train) to **Chiang Mai**, which can keep you busy for several days with its Thai cooking classes, temples, monk chats, markets and fabulous food. Take a road trip to the surrounding countryside, where you can hike to hill-tribe villages, meet rescued elephants and zipline through the forest. Don't forget to visit the cool highlands of Doi Suthep or Doi Inthanon, two famous northern mountains.

Ready for some beach time? Take a direct flight from Chiang Mai south to the tropical island of **Ko Samui**, where you can choose to live it up in a five-star resort or villa, or relax in a low-key beach bungalow in one of the island's quieter corners (yes, fortunately some still exist).

Make a day trip to uninhabited Ang Thong Marine National Marine Park before a stop at **Ko Pha-Ngan**; an easy boat trip from Ko Samui. Head to one of its famous Full Moon Parties, or time your visit to miss the crowds and enjoy some laid-back hammock hanging instead. Next door is tiny **Ko Tao**, Thailand's diving-certification headquarters; there are plenty of shallow reefs near the shore for snorkellers, too.

Head back to Samui to fly on to your next destination, or make your way back to Bangkok for some last-minute shopping.

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Top: Wat Phra Kaew (p61), Bangkok

Bottom: Monk Chat session (p328) at Wat Chedi Luang (p311), Chiang Mai

3 WEEKS

Best of Southern Thailand

Hitting all of Thailand's top beaches in one trip isn't easy, but with some serious island-hopping you can do it and still have bags of hammock time. This trip takes you there by land and sea, but if you need to hurry up, hop on a flight along the way.

From **Bangkok**, dip south into **Hua Hin**, an upmarket resort town where all the top hotel chains have a spot on the beach, then on to **Prachuap Khiri Khan**, where you can hire a bike and check out the curvy coast, bays and laid-back beach scene.

Now for some island time, first stop **Ko Tao** (via Chumphon). Sign up for a dive course or enjoy a few days of snorkelling before island-hopping to **Ko Pha-Ngan** for Full Moon Party fun or an other-side-of-the-island escape. Retire to the resort island of **Ko Samui** for some pampering (or, if you've the energy, more partying), from where it's a short ferry ride to transport hub Surat Thani. Buses leave hourly for **Khao Sok National Park**, where you can enjoy some jungle time in one of the world's oldest rainforests before making the short transfer to Khao Lak, a sleepy beach resort that serves as the perfect base for dive trips to the world-famous **Similan Islands** and, to the north, the Surin Islands. Consider spending a few days on a live-aboard to linger in the underwater world full of rays, sharks and seahorses. Once you surface, go south to **Phuket** – Thailand's largest island – and gulp down the numerous attractions and activities on offer here (don't miss a day trip to Ao Phang-Nga).

From Phuket, jump in a boat bound for **Ko Phi-Phi**, a party island that stays up all night and still looks fantastic in the morning. From here you can return to the mainland and explore the gorgeous coastline of **Krabi** (be sure to take a long-tail boat to Railay beach, regarded as one of the finest in Thailand) or ferry straight to **Ko Lanta** to collapse in a hammock and drink in the bucolic island life. Continue south by ferry past the beautiful **Trang Islands** to increasingly popular but still relatively undeveloped **Ko Lipe**, and catch a speedboat back to the mainland when you're ready to begin your journey home.

4 WEEKS The Grand Tour

A fully rounded trip to Thailand meanders through almost every corner of the kingdom. If you need to save time, hop on a flight – planes go everywhere.

Start off in **Bangkok**, and then take a train north to the ancient capital of **Ayuthaya**. Make a brief detour to the monkey town of **Lopburi**. From here, follow the culture trail north to **Sukhothai**, where you can cycle through the crumbling ruins of another ancient capital. Hightail it to **Chiang Mai**, the 'rose of the north', and cycle around the old temples. Then switchback into the mountains to the party scene of **Pai**. Climb deeper into the hills to the Myanmar-influenced town of **Mae Hong Son**. Loop back to Chiang Mai.

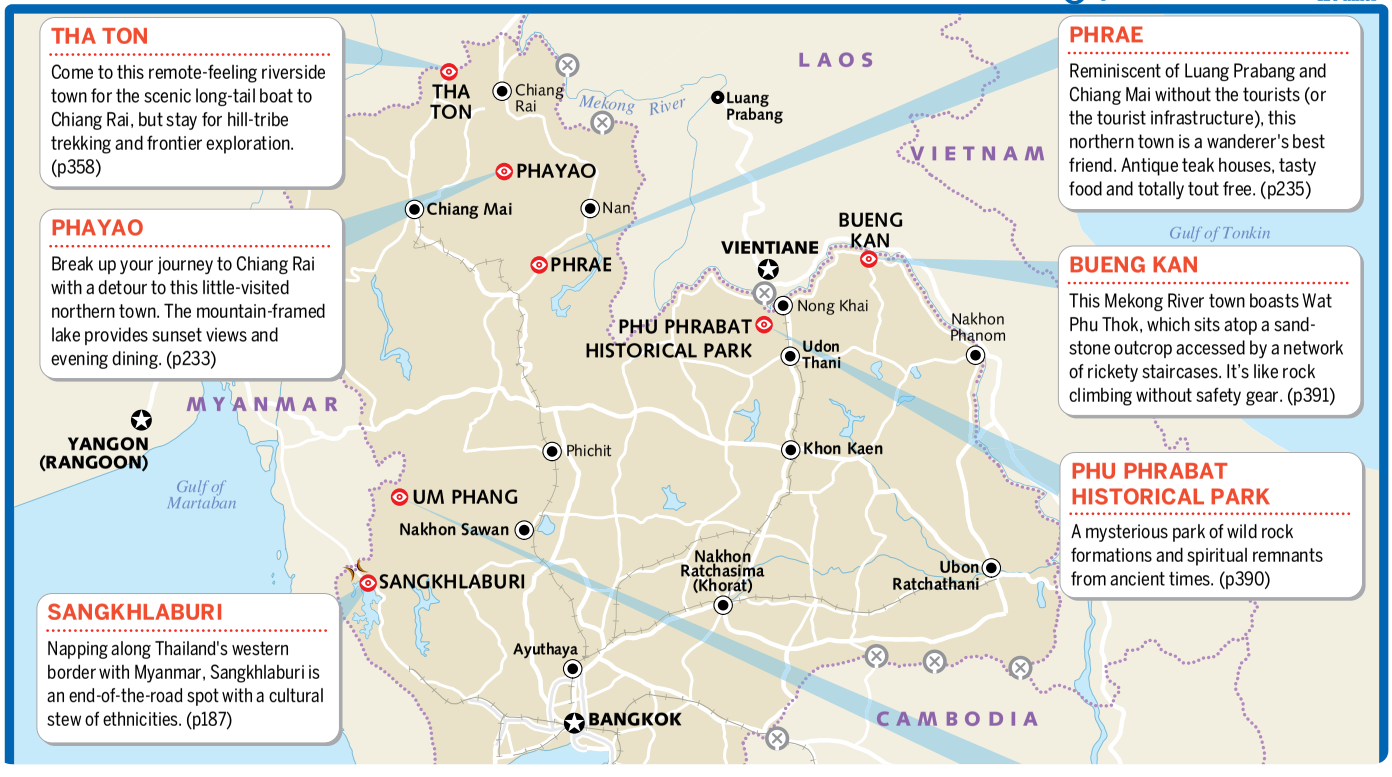
By now the beach is calling, so fly to the Gulf of Thailand and thread through **Ko Samui** for its resort-island trappings, **Ko Pha-Ngan** for beach bumming and partying, and **Ko Tao** for diving and snorkelling.

Get over to the Andaman Coast and its limestone mountains jutting out of the sea. **Ko Phi-Phi** is the prettiest, priciest and partiest of them all. Little **Ko Jum** holds tight to a fast-disappearing beach-shack, hippie vibe. **Ko Lanta** has gentrified into a package-tour destination, but the dive scene is the real attraction. Rock climbers opt for mainland **Krabi**, particularly Railay.

If you've got the itch for more sand then continue down the peninsula to the **Trang Islands**, another collection of limestone sea mountains lapped by gin-clear water. Or opt for the idyllic islands offshore from Satun. There's also emerging and midrange **Ko Bulon Leh**, rustic **Ko Tarutao** and laid-back **Ko Lipe**.

Or, you could skip the beaches south of Krabi and instead take a cultural antidote to the northeast, Thailand's agricultural heartland. Transit through Bangkok and then crawl through the jungles of **Khao Yai National Park**. From here, head to Nakhon Ratchasima (Khorat), a transit point for trips to the Angkor ruins at **Phimai**. 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 and forgotten temples with regal ambience.

Off the Beaten Track: Thailand



THA TON

Come to this remote-feeling riverside town for the scenic long-tail boat to Chiang Rai, but stay for hill-tribe trekking and frontier exploration. (p358)

PHAYAO

Break up your journey to Chiang Rai with a detour to this little-visited northern town. The mountain-framed lake provides sunset views and evening dining. (p233)

SANGKHLABURI

Napping along Thailand's western border with Myanmar, Sangkhlaburi is an end-of-the-road spot with a cultural stew of ethnicities. (p187)

PHRAE

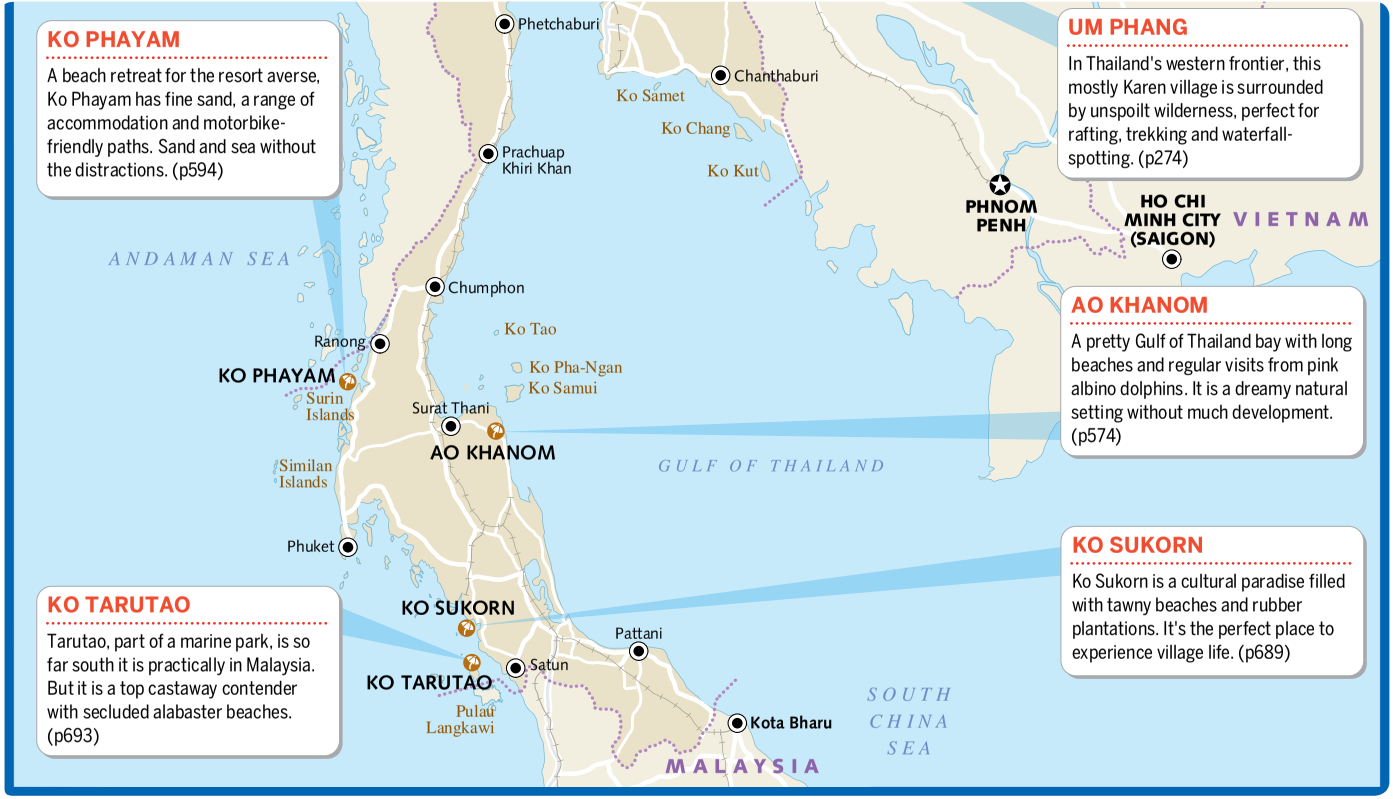
Reminiscent of Luang Prabang and Chiang Mai without the tourists (or the tourist infrastructure), this northern town is a wanderer's best friend. Antique teak houses, tasty food and totally tout free. (p235)

BUENG KAN

This Mekong River town boasts Wat Phu Thok, which sits atop a sandstone outcrop accessed by a network of rickety staircases. It's like rock climbing without safety gear. (p391)

PHU PHRABAT HISTORICAL PARK

A mysterious park of wild rock formations and spiritual remnants from ancient times. (p390)


KO PHAYAM
A beach retreat for the resort averse, Ko Phayam has fine sand, a range of accommodation and motorbike-friendly paths. Sand and sea without the distractions. (p594)
UM PHANG
In Thailand's western frontier, this mostly Karen village is surrounded by unspoilt wilderness, perfect for rafting, trekking and waterfall-spotting. (p274)
AO KHANOM
A pretty Gulf of Thailand bay with long beaches and regular visits from pink albino dolphins. It is a dreamy natural setting without much development. (p574)
KO SUKORN
Ko Sukorn is a cultural paradise filled with tawny beaches and rubber plantations. It's the perfect place to experience village life. (p689)
KO TARUTAO
Tarutao, part of a marine park, is so far south it is practically in Malaysia. But it is a top castaway contender with secluded alabaster beaches. (p693)
Phetchaburi
Chanthaburi
Ko Samet
Ko Chang
Ko Kut
Prachuap Khiri Khan
PHNOM PENH
HO CHI MINH CITY (SAIGON)
VIETNAM
ANDAMAN SEA
Chumphon
Ko Tao
Ko Pha-Ngan
Ko Samui
Ranong
KO PHAYAM
Surin Islands
Surat Thani
AO KHANOM
GULF OF THAILAND
Similan Islands
Phuket
KO SUKORN
Pattani
Satun
KO TARUTAO
Pulau Langkawi
Kota Bharu
SOUTH CHINA SEA
MALAYSIA

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Map Legend

Sights
- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours
- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping
- Sleeping
- Camping

Eating
- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife
- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment
- Entertainment

Shopping
- Shopping

Information
- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic
- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population
- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport
- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro/MRT/MTR station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- Skytrain/Subway station
- Taxi
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Underground station
- Other Transport

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book

Routes
- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries
- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

Hydrography
- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas
- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

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David Eimer
Hua Hin & the Upper Gulf A decade of visiting Thailand in search of beaches and fine food prompted David to relocate to Bangkok in 2012. Since then, his work as a journalist for a variety of newspapers and magazines has taken him from the far south of Thailand, to its northernmost extremities, with many stops in between. Originally from London, David spent seven years living in Beijing, and another five in LA, prior to moving to Bangkok.

Bruce Evans
Northeastern Thailand Bruce first visited Thailand in 1973 and it was love at first sight. He was back there in 1975 as part of a spiritual quest that ended in a Buddhist monastery in Northeast Thailand with the famous meditation teacher Venerable Ajahn Chah. He became a monk and stayed in various monasteries, mostly in Isan. After 17 years, he left the monkhood and worked as an editor and translator in Bangkok before moving to Australia in 1999, where he worked as an editor and managing editor at Lonely Planet until 2013. He now works as a freelance editor, translator and interpreter, and lives in Melbourne with his wife, Lek, and two children, Emilie and Richard. He is stoked to have had the chance to go back to his familiar haunts for this edition of *Thailand*.

Damian Harper
Ko Samui & the Lower Gulf Damian traded a career in bookselling for a four-year degree in Chinese, a decision that propelled him towards the Far East and a sharp change of tack into travel journalism and guidebook writing. Since the late 1990s, Damian has worked on Lonely Planet guides as diverse as *China, Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhou, London* and *Ireland*. You can find him at www.damianharper.com. damian also wrote the Month by Month, Travel With Children, People & Culture, Arts & Architecture and Environment & Wildlife chapters.

Isabella Noble
Phuket & the Andaman Coast English-Australian-Spanish Isabella writes about Thailand, India, Spain and beyond for Lonely Planet, Telegraph Travel and others. A big fan of Phuket despite its touristy reputation (she also penned Lonely Planet's *Pocket Phuket*), Isabella first fell for the Andaman on a 2008 backpacking extravaganza. Her highlights this time around: boating into gorgeous Ko Ngai, getting lost in colourful Phuket Town, finally tackling tubing in Khao Sok and escaping it all on Ko Phayam. She lives in London and blogs at www.isabellanoble.blogspot.com. Find her on Twitter and Instagram (@isabellamnoble).

Read more about Isabella at:
http://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/isabellanoble

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 Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, 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

Mark Beales

Ko Chang & Eastern Seaboard After working as a journalist for 13 years, Mark swapped the chilly shores of England for the sunnier coasts of Thailand. Since 2004 Mark has lived in Thailand, where he has contributed to around a dozen books for Lonely Planet, been a TV presenter and dragged his backpack to every country in Southeast Asia. He is currently Head of English at an international school on the eastern seaboard. Mark lives with his wife, Ann, and their son Daniel. For more on Mark's work, visit www.markbeales.com. Mark also wrote the Top 20, Need to Know, First Time, What's New, If You Like, Itineraries, Activities and Regions at a Glance chapters.

Read more about Mark at:
http://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/markbeales_thailand

Tim Bewer

Central Thailand While growing up, Tim didn't travel much. He's spent most of his adult life making up for this, and has since visited over 80 countries, including most in Southeast Asia. After university he worked briefly as a legislative assistant before quitting capitol life to backpack around West Africa. It was during this trip that the idea of becoming a freelance travel writer and photographer was hatched, and he's been at it ever since. He now lives in Khon Kaen, Thailand. Find him at www.timbewer.com.

Read more about Tim at:
http://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/timbewer

Joe Bindloss

Chiang Mai Province Joe was first smitten with Thailand while travelling overland through Asia in the early 1990s, and he has returned more times than he can count over the intervening years to climb, dive, trek and shop for cooking paraphernalia so he can make Thailand's fantastic food at home. Joe has written for more than 50 Lonely Planet titles, from *Thailand* and *Myanmar* to *India* and *Nepal*. When not on the road, Joe is Lonely Planet's Destination Editor for the Indian Subcontinent.

Austin Bush

Bangkok Austin came to Thailand in 1999 as part of a language-study program hosted by Chiang Mai University. The lure of city life, employment and spicy food eventually led him to Bangkok. City life, employment and spicy food have managed to keep him there since. Austin is a native of Oregon and a writer and photographer who often focuses on food; samples of his work can be seen at www.austinbushphotography.com. Austin also wrote the Welcome To Thailand, Eat Like a Local, Food & Drink, Food Spotter's Guide and Survival Guide chapters.

Read more about Austin at:
http://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/ost_th

OVER PAGE MORE WRITERS

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