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# Chiang Mai: A Peak into the Gem of Northern Thailand

## Chiang Mai, 2 Days

### Table of contents:

Guide Description 2

Itinerary Overview 3

Daily Itineraries 4

Chiang Mai Snapshot 8

# Guide Description



**AUTHOR NOTE:** There are many many fun and adventurous things to do in and around Chiang Mai. To enjoy the full beauty and the calm charm of Chiang Mai, stay for a few days so there's a chance to visit the elephants and ride on one as well. You could even visit with tigers as well as an orchid farm and possibly a Thai cooking class. However, if you only have two days, here is a guide one can use to explore on a low budget.

Be sure to try a Khao Soi noodles (northern curry noodle dish) while you are in Chiang Mai.

At either the night bazaar, the Saturday or the Sunday night market, a taste of Roti and fruit juices or smoothies are a must during your trip to Chiang Mai.

After a long day at Doi Inthanon, you could enjoy full-body Thai massage at around 180-200B (at a guest house). Thai massages can be as low as 120B if you know where to look. :-)  
Foot Massages are heavenly too.

Any questions about Chiang Mai, don't hesitate to ask. :-)

# Itinerary Overview

things to do  
restaurants  
hotels  
nightlife

## Day 1 - Chiang Mai



### Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep

An important Temple perched at the top of Doi Suthep



### Night Bazaar

Night Bazaar



### Sa Bai Garden

Guest House

## Day 2 - Chiang Mai



### Doi Inthanon National Park

See Thailand's Highest Peak



### Biking to the Wats

Biking your way around CM to the Wats



### Sunday Night Market

As the name indicates only on Sundays

**contact:**  
tel: +66 53 24 8604

**location:**  
Tambon Suthep  
Chiang Mai 50200

## 1 Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep

**DESCRIPTION:** One of Chiang Mai's most popular tourist destinations is Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep - a Buddhist temple located at the top of Doi Suthep, the 1676 meter mountain that towers grandly above Chiang Mai. Wat Phrathat is locally referred to simply as Doi Suthep, the name of the actual mountain itself. Located 15km up a windy road to the apex of Doi Suthep, Wat Phrathat greets you with an impressively steep and fierce-looking dragon staircase (16th-century Naga) that is definitely not for the weak of heart - there are about 300 steps. Wat Phrathat is a sacred site to many Thai people and should be respected as such, try and wear appropriate clothing (no singlets, flip flops and shorts). It features a beautiful golden Chedi (pagoda) and golden umbrella on the site where legend suggests a white elephant delivered a magical bone of the Buddha himself (see below). On a clear day Wat Phrathat offers wonderful views over Chiang Mai and the religious significance of the site can be felt through the reverential behavior of those pilgrims who visit it daily. For those travelers who can't tackle the dragon staircase, don't worry there is a funicular railway. But if you can resist the urge to take it, tackle the stairs, you will enjoy a sense of relief and achievement when you reach the top. Once inside, you can purchase a bunch of flowers, joss sticks and candles for 20 baht and pray for some good luck. The idea here is that you hold the offerings you have purchased while walking in a clockwise direction around the golden pagoda three times. Once completed, head for a praying area of your choosing, light up the joss sticks and candles and offer the bouquet to Buddha in return for blessings. If you are in desperately in need of some good luck, you can also ring some bronze bells around the side of the temple or be personally blessed by a monk inside a small room to the side of the Chedi. The Legend of the White Elephant According to legend, a monk named Sumanathera from Sukhothai had a dream in which Buddha told him to go to Pang Cha and look for a relic. Once there, he discovered a bone, which displayed magical powers - it vanished, reappeared, glowed and could move itself and reproduce itself. Many believed it was the shoulder bone of Buddha himself. Evidently, the relic apparently split in two with the smaller piece enshrined at a temple in Suandok. The other piece was placed by King Nu Naone (of the Lanna Kingdom) on the back of a white elephant, which was then released into the jungle. The elephant is said to have climbed Doi Suthep, trumpeted three times before dying on the spot. It was interpreted as a sign and King Nu Naone ordered the construction of a temple at the site.  
© NileGuide



Adam Coleman

**MY NOTE:** Be sure to read my post about exploring Chiang Mai under \$5 with a visit to Doi Suthep here <http://su.pr/31DLII>

**contact:**  
tel: +66 53 27 0066

**location:**  
Chang Klan Rd  
Chang Mai Chiang Mai 50100

## 2 Night Bazaar

**DESCRIPTION:** The Chiang Mai Night Bazaar is a sprawling market that runs the length of Chan Klan road, between Tha Pae and Sri Donchai roads. A must visit for any traveller to Chiang mai, the Night Bazaar features seemingly endless stalls of handicrafts, gimmicky t-shirts, watches, bags, haberdashery, woodcarvings, silver, souvenirs and of course, foreign brand knock-offs. Unlike the more locally produced wares found at other Chiang Mai markets, the Night Bazaar is unashamedly targeted towards foreigners and features a lot of the stuff you would expect to see around Khao San Road in Bangkok. On the second and third floor of the main Night Bazaar building on Chang Klan road you will find good designer home decor. On the ground floor, is an artists market where local artisans skillfully reproduce popular photos or create portraits. There are many quite appealing paintings here, just don't expect anything too unique - once an artist creates a popular style of painting that sells, it is not unusual for other artists to adopt the same style. Haggling is a must but do it with a big smile. On the opposite side of the street you will find the Kalare Night Bazaar and food court. The food is not great here compared with other parts of Chiang Mai but you can catch the free nightly show filled with Thai cultural dances and costumes. The stalls around this food court are probably better than those along the main road. If you crave western food, the Night Bazaar also features some good options. While a great evening out, the Night Bazaar doesn't quite match up to the wonderful and authentic Sunday Walking Market.

© NileGuide



wcities

**contact:**  
tel: 66 053208921

**location:**  
36 Ratchaphakhinai  
Phra Singh Chiang Mai

## 3 Sa Bai Garden

**DESCRIPTION:** Lovely guesthouse with restaurant and spa services. Close to Tha Phae Gate and a local market. Very friendly and helpful owner. This place will make you feel as though you are home. We did! We stayed there twice during our trip in 2009. NO AC. Mosquito Net provided. Very clean. Price range from 400 -600 B per night. © nile user

# Day 2 - Chiang Mai

QUICK NOTE

**contact:**

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<http://www.dnp.go.th/parkreserve/asp/style1/default.asp>

**location:**

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Chiang Mai Chiang Mai  
50160

## 1 Doi Inthanon National Park

**OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:**

It can get surprisingly cold on the mountain, so take some warm clothes.

**DESCRIPTION:** Standing at a height of 2565 meters, Doi Inthanon is the tallest peak in Thailand. Now named after King Inthawichayanon, who was also known as King Inthanon - the mountain has been had several names over the centuries including Doi Luang, meaning 'big mountain', and Doi Ang Ka, meaning 'crow pond peak', as there was once a pool popular with crows near the summit. Part of the mountain range that separates Burma from Thailand (Loi Lar Mountain Range or Daen Lao Range), Doi Inthanon features numerous 'must see' sights, including cascading waterfalls, an abundance of hiking trails, some beautiful views and a pair of impressive chedis, built in honor of the contemporary King and Queen. When you arrive at Doi Inthanon head for the park's administration centre. Here you can find all the information you need to plan your day. There is also a food court where you can fuel up before hitting the trails. You may also notice another example of the Royal Project, where hill tribes are learning to sustain themselves through agriculture rather than poppy farming. Make sure you check out the beautiful waterfalls surrounding Doi Inthanon, the most impressive of which is Mae Yai Falls. There is also a Karen weaving village in this area, Ban Pha Mon that is worth visiting. To get to Doi Inthanon from Chiang Mai (about 90 minutes) take route 108 towards Chomthong. Follow this road for 57 km (35 miles) and turn right onto route 1009 (Chomthong-Doi Inthanon Road). Take this road for 31km (19 miles) and you will arrive at the park entrance. © NileGuide



editor

**location:**

Follow Map  
Chiang Mai

## Biking to the Wats

**DESCRIPTION:** This is the best and the GREENEST way to see most, if not all, the Wats inside the moat or the old city. Renting a bike is fairly easy in Chiang Mai. Most guest houses and hotels have bikes for rental. Some may ask for a deposit of approx 2000B or leave your passport. Carry a map with you and if you are staying inside the moat, start with the nearest one to your hotel and go from there. Bike rental costs about 50B per day. © NileGuide

**location:**

Near the Moat (Start at Tha Phae Gate

## Sunday Night Market

**DESCRIPTION:** One of my favorite things to do in Chiang Mai when I am visiting. Much like the Night Bazaar, the Sunday night market has rows and rows of shopping. However, the food is more than amazing. Even the locals come to the night markets. A lot of the food shops will be inside the grounds of the Wats and if you get there early right when it opens around 5:00, food is very fresh and not so crowded. If you are a night owl and want to get there later, enjoy the crowd, chatting up with the locals, haggling, and do what we do which is to eat-walk-chat-drink-chat-eat again- repeat- you will have a blast! (By drink, I do not mean alcohol the entire time- we actually enjoy the fruit

smoothies- they are divine!) If possible, plan your trip so that a Sunday night market is included in your things-to-do list.

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# Chiang Mai Snapshot

## Local Info

In Northern Thailand and throughout Asia, Chiang Mai is one of the most popular tourist destinations not only because it offers a sophisticated taste of Thai culture in both the people and the landmarks, but it is easily navigable and inviting to tourists from all over the world, with exotic outdoor excursions, bustling market places, and respectful people at every corner.

Start high and work your way down by zipping through the tree tops of some of Thailand's most breathtaking forests; Mae Takhray national park in the eco-village of Mae Kampong, offers the newly opened 'Flight of the Gibbon', an aerial experience ideal for the whole family. Lush mountain forests are also accessible by trek or along whitewater excursions, easily arranged from one of multiple tourist offices throughout the city of Chiang Mai. While you are enjoying the exotic natural wonders and wildlife surrounding the city, be sure to check out the Patara Elephant Farm, a Thai-owned breeding and health-care facility focused exclusively on these majestic creatures.

Back in town, indulge in the rich tastes and history of the native Thai people in the form of their exquisite cuisine, markets, and entertainment options. The Chiang Mai Night Bazaar, off of Changklan Road, is said to be the biggest market in all of Thailand. Open everyday from sunset until midnight, the market has unique origins dating back to caravan traders hundreds of years ago, and has since evolved into an expansive marketplace offering food, handicrafts and traditional Thai clothing and art in a kaleidoscope of colors that will tantalize your senses.

A significant settlement of the Lanna Kingdom since the year 1296, the expansion and growth of this heavily Buddhist city is evident in more than 300 ornately decorated Buddhist temples. The most famous ones include Wat Phra Singh, Wat Chiang Man, and Wat Chedi Luang, all marked by more than 500 years of history. These are landmarks that bring visitors within breathing distance of ancient traditions in Thailand.

Ancient temples, fragrant markets and spicy dishes, travelers to this Asian gem are incapable of being disappointed. The locals

are welcoming and the options are limitless for the outdoor adventurers' spirit and the cultural enthusiast alike.

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## History

Chiang Mai is both a city and a province. Blessed with rich natural beauty, almost 70 percent is covered by mountains and forests. The population of more than 1.5 million makes Chiang Mai one of Thailand's largest provinces. Estimates vary, but over 200,000 people dwell in the city, while hill tribes inhabit the surrounding mountain areas. To learn more about their history, visit the Tribal Museum, after which you might like to book yourself an organized trek to a hilltribe village.

The city has a long and rich history, which has been encapsulated in the National Museum. To trace its beginnings, we have to go back more than 700 years to Yunnan, a province in southern China. Many ethnic Thais lived in this region, the kingdom of Nanchao, from the middle of the 7th century. In 1254, Kublai Khan conquered their kingdom and forced them south a few hundred kilometers to what is now northern Thailand. The Thai immigrants founded many new towns in the region, the largest of which was Chiang Rai, about 100 miles north of present-day Chiang Mai. Here, King Mengrai of the Nanchao Kingdom created the Kingdom of Lanna, which means the Kingdom of a Million Rice Fields.

First, however, he had to contend with the Haripoonchai Kingdom, which had already been a lively center of culture, art, and religion for some 600 years. After Mengrai and his followers conquered Haripoonchai, they retained many of its beautiful architectural styles and Buddhist art forms. Indeed, the Haripoonchai Kingdom significantly influenced the architecture of northern Thailand. This can be best appreciated in the small town of Lamphun, approximately 25 kilometers south of Chiang Mai, where, perhaps, the

most outstanding example is Wat Phra That Haripoonchai.

Mengrai's new kingdom quickly grew large, but it was restricted to what is now northern Thailand. A larger Thai kingdom, established by King Ramkamhaeng, ruler of Sukhothai, simultaneously flourished in the south. Fortunately the two leaders were on friendly terms and both kingdoms grew strong.

In 1291, King Mengrai wanted a new capital. He chose a location on the rich farming land between the Suthep mountain range and the Mae Ping river. The city spread out. A wall was built and a defensive moat encircled the city. Thus was the beginning of the ancient city of Chiang Mai. Strong gates, many of which are still present today, were constructed, along with Wat Chiang Man, a temple standing in the northeastern corner of the old part of town. It is here that Mengrai spent the last years of his life. It affords a great example of the beautiful northern Thai Lanna style. Another notable temple, tracing its roots from 1345, is Wat Phra Singh on the western side of the city. The original building has been added to over the centuries, but the temple is home to the Phra Sihing Buddha—a golden Buddha said to have been cast in Sri Lanka in A.D. 360. Another old temple is Wat Chedi Luang located in the southern part of the old city. Originally comprising four smaller temples, it bears an elegant chedi (spire) constructed in 1381, which stands where the original Chiang Mai city pillar once stood. Today the temple serves as a center for Buddhist learning in Chiang Mai.

Soon, the good relations that existed between King Mengrai and his southern counterpart began to sour. King Ramkamhaeng did not want to accept the Lanna Kingdom as an equal, and he made repeated attempts to turn that kingdom into a principality of his own. The Lanna Kingdom allied itself with the Burmese for protection, and remained under their influence from the 16th to 18th centuries. Burmese influence can still be seen in

## Chiang Mai Snapshot continued

Chiang Mai temple design and architecture from this period.

The city was abandoned for about 20 years from 1776 to 1796, and was then re-established by Chao Kawila, who is seen as a local hero almost as important as King Mengrai by modern inhabitants. The region came under the increasing influence of Siam during the 19th century, but did not finally become a province of Siam until 1932. Even as modern Thailand's second city, it retains many distinctive cultural features from the Lanna Kingdom.

Today Chiang Mai is a bustling, thriving city. It celebrated its 700th anniversary in 1996. ©

### Hotel Insights

In Chiang Mai, accommodation is easy to find and ranges all the way from reasonably priced guesthouses to first-class hotels. Most lodgings offer well-equipped rooms and amenities that should make your stay comfortable. The following provides a rundown on some recommended places you might want to consider for a relaxing stay.

Paddy Fields, in the **old walled city**, provides quality services in the heart of Chiang Mai. Other convenient and affordable accommodations within the area for business and leisure travelers include Red Hibiscus Guesthouse on Arak Road, Chiangmai Kristi Guesthouse on Rajdamnoen Road and Top North Guesthouse on Moonmuang Road. The Chang Puek Gate on the northern side of the walled city opens into Chotana Road where the Novotel chain of hotels has established a branch for the business traveler. Another comfortable place, which caters particularly to gays, is the affordable, friendly and well run Lotus Hotel. As you head toward the eastern gate, you will find the Montri Hotel, a budget establishment fairly near to the Night Bazaar. Also near here is the 15-storey Imperial Mae Ping, an affordably priced modern hotel with stylishly decorated rooms, a Jacuzzi and an outdoor swimming pool. There are several moderately priced choices with quality

service like Felix City Inn within the old city, and Tapae Place Hotel, which lies just off Tha Pae Road. On the same road is the clean and comfortable Home Place Hotel, with its extremely low room rates and its cozy atmosphere. Also located in the vicinity, you might want to check out Chiang Inn Hotel & Lodge, Lanna Palace Hotel, Park Hotel, Royal Princess, Chiang Mai Plaza Hotel, Suriwongse Zenith and Downtown Inn, to name but a few.

Hotels near the Mae Ping River boast scenic river views as major assets. They range from inexpensive, simple and clean, like the Marena Inn Hotel, Galare Guest House and People Place, to the more luxurious, such as the Diamond Riverside and Porn Ping Hotel. The Westin Riverside Plaza, managed by the Westin chain, lies on the opposite side of the river a little south of the town center.

The popular Huay Kaew Road and surrounding areas are blessed with a picturesque view of the mountains. At the near end stands the spacious Kad Suan Kaew, a shopping complex which also houses the deluxe Pang Suan Kaew. Just next door is the Chiang Mai Orchid, another first-class hotel. The Amari Rincome Hotel and Chiang Mai Hills provide similar standards of service and are located a little further down the road, while the Holiday Garden Hotel, a moderately priced lodge with standard amenities, is not very far away. Adjacent to Huay Kaew Road is the Chiang Mai-Lampang Superhighway, where new hotels have recently opened. The rates at the Amity Green Hills are on the high side but there is an assurance of quality here. For a more affordable package, try the Tarin Hotel right across the street. Sibsongpanna Villa, located on Suthep Road, which runs parallel to Huay Kaew Road, affords a quiet retreat at low cost.

If you are looking for a quiet holiday hideaway on the outskirts of town where you will be surrounded by bountiful nature, then the Belle Villa Resort furnishes the perfect choice. Another such option is the Regent Resort in Mae-Rim, where you have access to the health-enhancing services at the Lanna Spa within the resort. Both of

these establishments, particularly the latter, are somewhat pricey but come with high-quality service and facilities, and discount packages are offered from time to time. More reasonably priced options include the Pong Yang Garden Resort and the Suan Bua Hotel and Resort. To save cost and experience the comfort of home, Patara House in Mae-Rim is perfect for long stays as it operates on the 'Bed and Breakfast' concept.

Lisu Lodge, situated about 50 kilometers from Chiang Mai, offers an adventurous way to feel exhilarated and rejuvenated by the mountain air. Check out the details with the reservation office, East West Siam Co. Ltd. Muang Pai Resort qualifies as yet another cozy retreat amidst nature. It is a three-hour drive (180 kilometers) from Chiang Mai and provides well-equipped teak cottages.

Each lodging facility in Chiang Mai, guesthouse or resort, has its own charm and individuality. Wherever you stay in this exotic city, you will be greeted with the characteristic friendly smiles and warm hospitality of the Thai people. ©

### Restaurants Insights

Northern Thailand is the home to one of the world's finest cuisines, as can be seen by the number of Thai restaurants that have sprung up around the world in the last few years. One of the best ways to experience Chiang Mai's culinary delights is to sample some of the many different dishes that can be found in this 'Rose of the North'. Even the most fastidious of gastronomes will find satisfaction here!

The Thai people's imagination shines through in their preparation and presentation of food, and tourists soon discover that dining in Chiang Mai is a special delight. As is often the case in Thailand, some of the tastiest meals prove to be some of the most affordable and these can be found in the city's many food stalls. However, for service, decor and topnotch cuisine, Chiang Mai also offers a variety to choose from.

## Chiang Mai Snapshot continued

### Old City

One of the best ways to experience the region's culture and cuisine is to attend akhantoke dinner, a traditional northern Thai way of extending hospitality. The name originates from the small round table made of lacquered wood or bamboo that is used on these occasions. Guests are garlanded with flowers called phuang mali and are entertained with dance performances during the meal. Traditional dishes normally served at these events include kaeng haeng le, a delicious curried pork, Burmese style; nam phrik ong, a spicy dip of ground pork and tomatoes; kaeng khae kai, a chicken and vegetable curry; and khao niao, glutinous rice, the staple cereal of Chiang Mai. You can experience a khantoke dinner at the following places—Nakorn Lanna 1296, The Old Chiang Mai Cultural Center and Kantoke Palace.

Chiang Mai abounds in vegetarian food. If you are in the old city, try AUM Vegetarian Restaurant, where the specialty is khao soy, a coconut curry with crisp noodles and a north Thailand favorite. Equally recommended is the very inexpensive Chiang Mai Vegetarian Society, which is open for breakfast and lunch and serves some tasty cuisine, buffet style. Quite near to the Night Bazaar, and a bit more upscale, is the Whole Earth Restaurant which provides a relaxed ambience in a beautiful garden setting.

### Mae Ping River

For some wonderful traditional Thai food, try Kanjana, The Wok, Huen Phen, Ratana's Kitchen or Antique House. For the more adventurous gourmet, Aron Rai stocks three kinds of fried insect dishes, all northern delicacies: Rot duan, a kind of caterpillar; meng muan, a woodborer; and gong gong, a type of cricket. For something unusual, experience dining amidst the rice paddies at The Rain Forest, about 10 kilometers south of the city. However, if you find yourself near the Night Bazaar, check out White Lotus or the Kalare Food and Shopping Center, which also provides live entertainment.

Many restaurants serve a mixture of Western food and traditional Thai fare, and some along the river also offer live music. Popular venues are The Riverside Bar and Restaurant, The Good View and La Brasserie. For a quiet, more romantic meal on the river, check out Tha Nam, or dine on the river by taking the Mae Ping River Cruise.

### Nimmanhaeminda Road

For topnotch European cuisine, Chiang Mai is a great place. Classic Italian fare is served at da Stefano, Art Café, Pum Pui and Piccola Roma Palace. French favorites can be found at Chez John Restaurant and Chez Daniel. For a highly stimulating grande buffe, try Le Coq d'Or, which has been serving haute cuisine for more than 30 years. For German fare, make your way to Le Garage or German Hofbrauhaus. Sitting Bull offers a good steak in an American Old West setting. If you crave a pizza, head to La Villa, which boasts Chiang Mai's only authentic wood-fired oven for baking delicious pizzas and homemade focaccia. If it is a pint of beer you are after, you could do no better than go to the Red Lion English Pub and Restaurant or The Irish Pub, crowded on Thursday nights for the local pub quiz. Some of the best coffee can be found at JJ's Restaurant and Bakery, Fish'n' Chip Shop, Cafe Chic and Libernard Café.

To experience many different foods all in one sitting, try some of the good-quality buffet-style luncheons, including Nang Nual Seafood, famous for fresh seafood, and two others located in hotels—Suriwongse Zenith and the Amari Rincome Hotel. For sushi, there is Irasshai Japanese Restaurant or Yamato.

Another way to experience Thai cuisine is to cook it yourself! Traditional cooking courses are popular. They include an introduction to Thai ingredients, paste making and a tour of a local market. Most courses are offered for one to three days and include an easy-to-follow recipe book. You can learn to enjoy Thai cuisine through cooking with the Chiang Mai Thai Cookery School, Thai Kitchen Cookery School or

Sompet Travel & Thai Cooking School. Whether you cook it yourself, dine by the river or have a drink in a pub, something enjoyable awaits you when you go dining and drinking in the 'Rose of the North'. Chok-dee, kab!

©

## Nightlife Insights

Chiang Mai is an easygoing yet active city. On the one hand, it appears very sophisticated and, to some degree, very Westernized; on the other hand, influences from the surrounding farming communities and hill tribes infuse everyday life. This division between Western and traditional Thai lifestyles characterizes almost everything in Chiang Mai, including entertainment. Visitors can opt for Western-style entertainment or join the local crowd rowdily cheering away at a Thai match, savor akhantoke dinner with Thai dancing, or explore Chiang Mai on a river cruise.

### Kickboxing

The ancient martial art of muay Thai, or Thai kickboxing, is as popular in Chiang Mai as anywhere else in Thailand. Nowadays, most muay Thai matches are held in Western-style boxing arenas, watched by people from all walks of life rooting for (and betting on) their favorite fighters. A dance-like ritual initiates each fight, with musical accompaniment from a small orchestra. This symbolizes the fighters' gratitude to the spirits and their prayer for strength and courage. The fighting itself looks codified but brutal, involving free-for-all kicks and elbow blows to the body and face (do not be surprised if one boxer knocks another one out—stretchers are a common sight at Thai boxing matches). You can watch muay Thai at Gawila Boxing Stadium, where boxers from all over Thailand compete, usually at 7.30pm on weekend nights. You can also see less compelling exhibitions of Muay Thai at a small stadium on Loi Kroh, near the Night Bazaar.

### Khantoke/ Dinner/ Dance

A traditional khantoke dinner is a sumptuous occasion. Diners sit on cushions

## Chiang Mai Snapshot continued

while elegantly attired attendants serve them a variety of appetizers, salads, curries and rice dishes. During the meal, traditional Thai dancers entertain the guests with fluid, graceful performances using enormous fans and other props. You can experience this age-old tradition at The Old Chiang Mai Cultural Center, Nakorn Lanna 1296 or Kantoke Palace.

While you can enjoy traditional Thai dance at a khantoke restaurant such as The Old Chiang Mai Cultural Center, you can also check out dancing in the evenings over a simple meal at the Kalare Food and Shopping Center. This is a good place to get your first taste of Thai dancing. At Kalare, diners select their own food from a host of stalls serving northern Thai, Indian, Middle Eastern and Western dishes.

### Live Music

Live guitar is especially popular in Thailand. Dinner with live music is available at La Brasserie, Good View and Huan Suntaree. Other popular venues include Phar Lap, The Gallery, The Good View and Antique House 2 River Terrace. The Riverside Bar and Restaurant is probably the most popular dinner-with-live-music spot in Chiang Mai, among both Thais and farangs (foreigners), with several different bands exuberantly and skillfully playing Western popular music from Metallica to Eric Clapton and the Cranberries. Scene Song Say Pub provides an ultra-hip option for live music on weekends, and Drunken Flower is a popular hang-out for local university students. Just about any bar in Chiang Mai has karaoke. Croon your own favorites at Romantic Restaurant and Pub or check out the numerous karaoke clubs across the street from Kad Suan Kaew. Visitors to any part of Thailand will quickly learn that 'lady boys', young men who dress as women, are as much a part of the culture as khantoke and Muay Thai. For an over-the-top lady-boy performance, stop by Blue Moon Cabaret near Tha Pae Gate (you can't miss the 'ladies' beckoning you to the show!).

### Mae Ping River

No visit to Chiang Mai is complete without a leisurely cruise up the Mae Ping River. The Mae Ping River Cruise allows you to sit back and gaze at the passing countryside for a couple of hours, or you may call The Riverside Bar and Restaurant for information on its nightly dinner cruises.

### Western Entertainment

Even the most seasoned traveler needs an occasional dip into familiar Western-style entertainment. For first-release movies, Vista Cinema, which has two locations at Kad Suan Kaew (one on the top floor of the mall and the other across the street), screens about three films a week, each one shown four or five times a day. Call +66 53 262 661 for English language listings and show times. Kad Suan Kaew also offers other forms of entertainment. Bully Sky Ice, an ice-skating rink on the top of the building, commands a panoramic view of the city. Here you can learn to skate, brush up on your triple-toe loops, or just watch the skaters. The well-maintained rink stays open until 1am. Bowling offers yet another entertainment option. Bully Bowl also in Kad Suan Kaew, feels like a cross between a bowling alley and a disco, with dance music throbbing while customers toss back Singha beers between rounds. Bowling is a popular late-night and weekend activity for local teenagers, so it is no wonder Bully Bowl stays open until 2am. The Irish Pub is an extremely popular expatriate hangout, especially on Thursday nights when an occasionally raucous Trivial Pursuit tournament rages on from about 8.30p.

©

## Things to Do Insights

Chiang Mai is an exotic city rich in cultural heritage. There are many things to see in the area. You might want to take an organized tour through a travel agent, such as Chiangmai Jasmine Travel or North Pearl Travel, or you could opt to do the sights on your own using a taxi (si-lor), bus or a rented vehicle from companies like Journey Co. Ltd. and North Wheels. Whichever you choose, here are five

recommended itineraries you might want to consider. The Old Walled City and Temple Trail.

### Old City

Scores of temples (wat) lie within the old walled city, most of them built during ancient times by the Lanna dynasty. Some of these reflect Burmese, Sri Lankan and Mon influences in their design. Wat Chedi Luang in the city center, on Prapoklao Road, is a good starting point. An earthquake partially destroyed the stupa here in 1545, but it still retains a certain charm. Legend has it that it was here that King Mengrai was struck by lightning! On Ratchdamnoen-Singharaj Road stands Wat Phra Singh, where devotees flock during Songkran (Thai New Year) to bathe the Phra Sihing Buddha image in water. Nearby is Wat Chiang Man, the oldest temple in Chiang Mai and home to the Crystal Buddha. Your route can continue either along Suthep Road or Huay Kaew Road. Suthep Road leads to Wat Suan Dok in the gardens of the Lanna royal residence. Further down is a zoo that also serves as the Observation Studies Center on Animals and the Natural Environment. Nearby lies Wat Umong, an interesting temple in a forest park, and itself a center of meditation. The trail from Huay Kaew Road leads toward the Superhighway, which takes you to Wat Jed Yod, a fifteenth century temple with seven spires and an Indian-inspired architecture. Alongside is the National Museum.

### Suthep Mountain

The Suthep Mountain Route. Chiang Mai's most prominent natural landmark, Suthep Mountain, is easily accessed by Huay Kaew Road. On the way, drop by Chiang Mai Zoo or Huay Kaew Waterfall. At the foot of the mountain lies Khrua Srivichai Monument, built in memory of one of Thailand's most revered monks. Devotees seek blessings here before driving up to the holy temple, Wat Phra Tat Doi Suthep, famous for its artworks depicting the life of the Buddha and its golden spire. Opposite is the Orchid Jade Factory, with its selection of jade and other precious stones. A few minutes' drive takes you to Phu Phing

## Chiang Mai Snapshot continued

Palace, the enchanting residence of the royal family. Top off the day by visiting the Meo Tribal Village. San Kampaeng and Bor Sang Handicraft Village. Handicrafts from northern Thailand are famous throughout the world for their delicate designs and excellent quality. To view these beautiful creations, take the Superhighway to San Kampaeng Road. Check out Jolie Femme Thai Silk for garments and accessories. Antiques and decorative items may be viewed at Iyara Art and Arts& Crafts, ceramics at Prempracha's Collection, and blue and green celadon at Baan Celadon and Siam Celadon. For woodcarvings, try Eungkum Woodcarving and Chiang Mai Tusnaporn Co. Ltd. The Umbrella Making Centre makes typical northern Thai-style umbrellas, while local silver products can be purchased at Lanna Thai and Chiang Mai Silverware Patanaanunwong Co. Ltd. Other interesting venues include Bronze House for bronze, Meo Jaidee Studio for candles and Hill Tribe Resins& Dolls for traditional creations.

### Hangdong-Samerng-Mae-Rim

A day trip to the south should be on every visitor's itinerary. Start on Route 108 or the Chiang Mai-Hang Dong Road, which is lined with beautiful temples and handicraft outlets such as Ban Chang Kham. As you drive toward Samerng, you will discover a beautiful hideaway amongst nature at Belle Villa Resort. From Samerng, take Mae-Rim Road back to Chiang Mai. This offers many interesting places to see. Visit the lush green Queen Sirikit Botanical Garden or the Mae Sa Elephant Training Camp, where shows are scheduled daily. Soon you will come to the refreshing Mae Sa Waterfall, Sai Nam Phung Orchid Nursery and Butterfly Farm, Mae Sa Butterfly and Orchid Farm and the Snake Farm. There is also Tita Gallery, which hosts regular exhibitions. Before continuing, enjoy a meal at Regent Resort and pamper yourself at the Lanna Spa. On the way back to the city, you will pass the Thai Buffalo Training Camp, the historical Dara Pirom Museum and the enchanting Tribal Museum located in the beautiful Rama IX Park.

### Chiang Rai& Surrounding Areas

Approximately three hours from Chiang Mai lies another exotic city, Chiang Rai, dotted with several ancient monuments and temples. From here, take the route to Chiang Khong, a farming and fishing community on the banks of the Mekong River. North is the old fortress town of Chiang Saen, the first northern capital of Thailand. A twenty-minute drive takes you to the infamous Golden Triangle, poppy country, where Burma, Laos and Thailand all meet. Near here is Mae Sai, a bustling gem trading border town. You can cross to Tachilek on the Burmese side, but first check with the authorities that you are allowed to do so. An alternative route is to drive from Chiang Mai to Ban Tha Ton and then take a boat(Mae Kok River Boat Service) to Chiang Rai. This wonderful three-hour cruise down the river passes various hill tribe settlements, the most popular one being the elephant town of Ruammitr Village.

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## Travel Tips

### Getting There

#### Air

Chiang Mai International Airport(+66 53 270222 23/ <http://www.airportthai.co.th/airportnew/chmai/html/>) serves as the gateway to Northern Thailand. Airlines include:

Thai Airway International(+66 53 92 2150/ <http://www.thaiairways.com/>)

Bangkok Airway Company Ltd.(+66 53 92 2204/ <http://www.bangkokair.com/>)

Air Asia(+603 8660 4343/ <http://www.airasia.com/>)

Orient Thai Airline(+66 53 92 2159/ <http://www.orient-thai.com/>)

Nok Air(+66 53 92 2183/ <http://www.nokair.co.th/>)

Phuket Airlines(+66 53 92 2118 9/ <http://www.phuketairlines.com/>)

Lao Aviation(+66 53 22 3401/ <http://www.lao-aviation.com/>)

Silk Air(+66 53 27 6459/ <http://www.silkair.com/>)

Air Mandalay(+66 53 20 5185 7/ <http://www.air-mandalay.com/>)

Mandarin Airlines(+66 53 92 2237/ <http://www.mandarin-airlines.com/>)

For international travelers and those who prefer to fly through Bangkok, the Bangkok International Airport(BKK)(+66 02 535 1111/ <http://www.airportthai.co.th/>), serves as the gateway to Thailand. Transfer to a flight to the Chiang Mai International Airport. Major airlines include:

Air Canada(+1 800 776 3000/ <http://www.aircanada.ca/>)

Air China(+1 800 227 5118/ <http://www.china-airlines.com/>)

Air France(+1 800 871 1366/ <http://www.airfrance.com/>)

Air New Zealand(+1 800 663 5494/ <http://www.airnz.com/>)

American Airlines(+1 800 433 7300/ <http://www.aa.com/>)

British Airways(+1 800 247 9297/ <http://www.british-airways.com/>)

Continental(+1 800 525 0280/ <http://www.continental.com/>)

El Al(+1 800 223 6700/ <http://www.elal.co.il/>)

Japan Airlines(+1 800 525 3663/ <http://www.japanair.com/>)

Korean Air(+1 800 438 5000/ <http://www.koreanair.com/>)

Lufthansa(+1 800 645 3880/ <http://www.lufthansa.com/>)

Northwest(+1 800 225 2525/ <http://www.nwa.com/>)

Nippon(+1 888 422 7533/ <http://www.ana.co.jp/>)

Qantas(+1 604 279 6611/ <http://www.qantas.com/>)

United(+1 800 241 6522/ <http://www.ual.com/>)

### From the Airport

#### Taxi:

Taxis from the airport charge a flat rate of THB100 to the heart of the city, but the fee is a bit more for places outside of the immediate vicinity. Purchase a ticket at the

## Chiang Mai Snapshot continued

taxi booth in the arrival hall, then go to the taxi stand.

### Rental Cars:

Available car rental companies include:

Avis(+1 800 831 2847/ <http://www.avis.com/>)

Budget(+1 800 527 0700/ <http://www.budget.com/>)

Hertz(+1 800 654 3131/ <http://www.hertz.com/>)

### Train

State Railways of Thailand(+66 53 02 225 0300) From Bangkok to Chiang Mai: Hua Lampong Railway Station(+66 53 2223 7010/1690)

### Bus

The North/Northeastern Bus Terminal(+66 02 272 0296) caters to buses departing to the north from Bangkok, including Chiang Mai, the Laos border and Lampang. Arcade Bus Station(Chiang Mai)(+66 53 24 2664)

### Car

Driving in Thailand offers obvious convenience, but also an obvious risk. Road congestion is constant and locals exhibit the same cautionary driving skills as all-night revelers crazed on cheap well whiskey. Regardless of fault foreigners are always blamed in accidents. Keep in mind that seat belts are mandatory and driving is on the left. National Highways 32 and 117 access Chiang Mai.

### Getting Around

#### Taxi

In Chiang Mai taxi services are provided by Taxi Meter Chiang Mai and Taxi Lanna Company Limited.

#### Songtao& Tuk-Tuk

Songtaos(covered pickup trucks) are the primary mode of public transportation in the city. These red pickups have two long

bench seats and are called seelors(four wheels) by the locals. They cover all routes in Chiang Mai 24 hours daily. Since they have no fixed stopping points, you should hail one going in your general direction and tell the driver your destination. Since most of the drivers do not speak English, it is recommended that you ask your hotel concierge write your destination in Thai for you before departure. If the driver asks for a huge fee, they are trying to rip you off. They will do this especially if the songtao is empty. Do not board these pickups.

Three-wheeled, motorized, open sided vehicles called tuk-tuks dominate the streets of Chiang Mai. They are ideally suited for short trips around the city(they possess the capacity for long, across town hauls but the constant exposure to truck exhaust fumes while endlessly idling in traffic tends to limit their appeal to three or four blocks). The drivers consider haggling as a lofty human virtue so agree to a set price before entering. Be sure to decline any"Shopping tours", they are attempting to rip you off.

#### Motorcycles& Bicycles

You can rent motorcycles from guesthouses along the Ping River and shops around Chaiyapoom Road. It is important to verify that you have the necessary insurance because the locals drive like maniacs. Make sure to wear a helmet to ensure your safety! You will probably have to leave your passport as security, but do not leave your credit card.

Renting a bicycle is one of the best ways to see Chiang Mai, especially the Old City. It is recommended that you avoid traveling during rush hour and make sure to use caution when traveling on busy streets. You can rent a bicycle from guesthouses or shops around the Old City.

#### Bus

After all bus services were cancelled in 1997, a new network of buses has been operating since early 2007. The buses are efficient, routes, however, change frequently. Unfortunately, the website is only available in the native language:<http://www.chiangmaibus.com/index.php/>

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## Fun Facts

**Chiang Mai Country:** Thailand

**Chiang Mai by the Numbers:**

Population: 170,000

Elevation: 314 m/ 1030 ft

Average Annual Rainfall: 120.6 cm/ 47.5 in

Average January Temperature: 21.6°C/ 71°F

Average July Temperature: 28°C/ 82°F

### Quick Facts:

Major Industries: Tourism, the teak industry, silver and wood articles, pottery, silk and cotton goods

Electricity: 220 volts, 50 Hz; standard two-pin plug

Time Zone: GMT+ 7

Country Dialing Code:+66

Area Code: 53

Religion: 85% Buddhists

Number of Buddhist temples: over 300

Number of Buddhist temples in the Province: 1253 Estimated number of tourists/year: 24,000

### Did You Know?

Chiang Mai means"new city" and was founded by King Mengrai in 1296. It became the capital of the Lannathai kingdom, following Chiang Rai.

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