

Main Spots to Visit in Thailand

Ayutthaya

The former capital of Siam for 477 years, Ayutthaya is a city rich in history and classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Though partially destroyed by the Burmese in the 18th century, the remains of its grand Buddhist monasteries still reflect the city's former magnificence.

Bangkok

Bangkok, the "City of Angels," is Thailand's largest city. Also known as Krung Thep, it is home to around 10 million people and serves as the country's political, administrative, commercial, social, and cultural capital. An eclectic mixture of tradition and modernity sets Bangkok apart as Asia's most exotic and fascinating city. The old City, in the northwest, contains the largest concentration of historical sights, including the Grand Palace, the National Museum, and Wat Arun. The Chao Praya River, the city's lifeline, divides into 2 distinct towns, Bangkok on its right bank and Thonburi on its left bank. A shopping paradise of Southeast Asia, Bangkok also offers lively nightlife, bustling markets, shops, restaurants, magnificent temples, museums, palaces, and parks, ensuring something for every visitor.

Chiang Mai

Known as the "Rose of the North," Chiang Mai is blessed with stunning natural beauty and unique indigenous cultural identity. The kingdom was founded by King Mengrai by merging the various city-states in the region in 1296. Today, Chiang Mai is the economic, communications, cultural, and tourism centre of Northern Thailand.

About 700 kilometres from Bangkok, Chiang Mai is situated in the Mae Ping River basin some 310 metres above sea level. Surrounded by high mountain ranges, it covers an area of approximately 20,107 square kilometres. The fertile terrain consists mainly of mountains and jungles parts, many of which are within national parks. These areas are lush with abundant flora and fauna. There are many sites and locations where tourists can learn about the unique lifestyles of the tribal people who live in the hills.

Chiang Rai

One of Thailand's oldest cities, Chiang Rai was established in 1262 by King Mengrai as the capital of the first independent kingdom in the country, and the heart of the Lanna Kingdom. Yet, after just 34 years of glory, Mengrai moved the capital south to Lamphun and then finally to Chiang Mai. As a result, Chiang Rai fell into decline and was fought over by the Siamese and Burmese until it was finally incorporated into the Siamese Kingdom in 1786.

Located in the northernmost province of Thailand, Chiang Rai is situated on the Kok River basin 416 metres above sea level. With an area of some 11,678 square kilometres, it is about 785 kilometres from Bangkok. Mostly mountains, it reaches the Mae Khong River to the north and borders both Myanmar and Laos.

The province boasts a wealth of natural attractions, ancient landmarks, and remnants of its history. It is also home to several hill tribes, each with their unique way of life, and a tourism gateway into Myanmar and Laos.

Unlike other towns, Chiang Rai is small enough to make visitors feel welcome, but large enough to accommodate all these people in comfortable accommodations.

Isan Region

Often overlooked by most tourists, Isan offers an incredible opportunity to explore the more authentic and rural side of Thailand. With its stunning natural beauty, the region is home to majestic national parks and ancient Angkorian ruins, making it a perfect destination for trekking and adventure.

Kanchanaburi

"Muang" Kanchanaburi is the capital of Kanchanaburi Province, located where the River Kwai Noi and River Kwai Yai merge to form the Maeklong (Mekong). An ancient Thai civilization, Kanchanaburi is best known for its more recent history when, during World War II the Japanese Imperial Army began construction of the infamous "Death Railway" which included the Bridge Over The River Kwai.

In total, over 100,000 prisoners of war lost their lives building the railway, tunnels, and the famous bridge.

A relatively modern province, the origins of Kanchanaburi can be traced back to the reign of King Rama I, who established the area as a defence against Burmese invasions in the late 18th century.

Over the next century, Thailand emerged as the economic powerhouse of Southeast Asia, with small towns such as Kanchanaburi playing a key role in complementing the established Kingdoms of Ayutthaya, Sukothai, and Bangkok.

Khao Yai

Located in the Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Khao Yai is Thailand's third-largest national park. Within its 2000 km² space, the park is home to a diversity of fauna and flora. Many trekking routes will allow travelers to admire different waterfalls, colorful birds, and other jungle animals.

Ko Phi Phi

Located in Krabi Province in southern Thailand, the Phi Phi Islands archipelago consists of 6 islands that have earned an incredible reputation worldwide. Although very frequented by tourists, Ko Phi Phi is still regarded as having some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. Among these islands, Phi Phi Don stands out as a must-see, offering breathtaking views that will surely leave travelers speechless.

Koh Chang

The second largest island in Thailand, Koh Chang is often considered one of the most impressive. With its white sand beaches and diverse wildlife, it is the ideal spot for jungle treks, often populated by colorful birds. For sea lovers, Koh Chang offers incredible seabeds, ensuring a wonderful experience both on land and underwater.

Krabi

If the south is the crown of Thailand's stunning coastal regions, then Krabi is undoubtedly one of its most sparkling jewels. Located along the Andaman Sea, it boasts some of the Kingdom's finest and most breathtaking beaches. Pristine stretches of soft sand greet visitors, while crystal-clear waters offer the perfect setting for swimming, snorkeling, and other marine adventures. Krabi also holds historical significance, with stone tools, ancient pottery, cave drawings, and skeletal remains dating back tens of thousands of years.

Describing Krabi as a fantastic destination to relax and enjoy a tropical climate is an understatement. Its laid-back pace of life and secluded beaches, some only accessible by boat, create the quintessential island getaway atmosphere. While it remains less developed than the bustling Phuket, Krabi is quickly gaining popularity as a resort destination. Accommodations are plentiful, particularly in the main area of Ao Nang, which also offers a variety of restaurants and shops. For those seeking adventure, Krabi delivers activities like kayaking, rock climbing, trekking, cave exploration, and island hopping, as well as the natural beauty of the Hat Noppharat Thara-Ko Phi Phi National Park.

Mae Hong Son

Tucked away in northern Thailand, Mae Hong Son was once a remote and hard-to-reach province, its natural beauty largely unseen by many travelers. Today, this land of mist-covered hills, hidden valleys, and ethnic hill-tribe villages is much more accessible, yet it still retains its allure as a rugged, mystical destination.

Located about 900 km from Bangkok, Mae Hong Son is bordered by Myanmar to the north and west, and its culture is strongly influenced by Burmese architecture, evident in its temples and buildings. The province is home to a rich tapestry of ethnic groups, including Thai, Shan, and hill tribes like the Karen, Hmong, Lahu, Lisu, and Padong. The Padong women, famous for their elongated necks adorned with brass rings, are one of the province's most unique and fascinating attractions.

Mae Hong Son enjoys a cooler climate than most of Thailand, making it a perfect destination for nature-based activities. Visitors can enjoy rafting, hiking through lush jungles, visiting hilltribe villages, exciting elephant rides, and much more.

Nakhon Ratchasima (Khorat)

The city of various Khmer ruins, commonly known as Khorat or Korat (a shortened form of the ancient name Korakapura), is located at the western edge of the Khorat Plateau, 260 kilometers northeast of Bangkok. Historically, it marked the boundary between Lao and Siamese territories but is now considered a gateway to the Northeast (Isan).

Archaeological evidence reveals that two ancient towns, Sema and Korakapura, existed in what is now the Sung Noen district, 30 km west of present-day Khorat. Once part of the Khmer Empire, the city was relocated by King Narai between 1656 and 1688 to its current position. In 1827, the city was attacked by Anouvong, the King of Vientiane, in an attempt to stop Siamese expansion into Laos. Thao Suranaree, a local heroine, is credited with saving the city from the invasion, and a statue of her stands in the city center. The old town of Khorat, to the west of the Thao Suranaree monument, was designed by a French engineer who is believed to have also designed Naraimaharaj Palace in Lopburi.

Nakhon Ratchasima is well connected by the northeastern railway line, linking Bangkok to Ubon Ratchasima and Nong Khai. Thai Highway 2 (Friendship Highway) also passes through the city, and the Nakhon Ratchasima Airport, located 26 km east of the city, was previously a hub for passenger flights. However, as of 30 November 2006, the airport no longer handles passenger traffic, and despite several attempts to re-establish passenger services at low fares, the airport continues to face financial challenges. Authorities are still exploring ways to make the over 400 million Baht investment viable.

Phuket

Dubbed the 'Pearl of the South' by the tourism industry, Phuket is Thailand's largest island, located in the Andaman Sea off the southwestern coast. Connected to the mainland by a bridge, Phuket has maintained a unique culture influenced by Chinese and Portuguese heritage, as well as that of the indigenous Chao Naam sea-faring people. Approximately 35% of the island's population is Thai Muslim.

The island's landscape varies from rocky beaches and expansive sandy shores to limestone cliffs and lush, forested hills. While Phuket is known for its beautiful beaches, tropical vegetation, and laid-back atmosphere, it faces challenges from overdevelopment and environmental strain. Popular resorts such as Patong, Karon, and Kata are well-known, but quieter, less crowded beaches can be found all around the island. Phuket Town, located in the southeast, serves as a convenient base for exploration. Don't miss the island's interior, which features rice paddies, rubber and cashew nut plantations, and the last remaining rainforest on the island.

Samui

At 247 sq km (95 sq miles), Koh Samui is Thailand's third-largest island, following Phuket and Koh Chang. Once known as the world's largest coconut plantation until the arrival of backpackers in the 1970s, tourism has since become the island's primary source of income. Koh Samui's beaches are renowned worldwide, with its long, pristine stretches drawing around 500,000 visitors annually. Chaweng Beach, in particular, is famous for being a vibrant hotspot for an international party crowd.

Sukhotai

The former capital of Thailand in the 13th century, Sukhothai has since become a popular tourist destination. Located just a few kilometers from the ruins of the ancient city, visitors can explore magnificent temples and historical monuments that showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Sukhothai Kingdom. The Sukhothai Historical Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is the highlight of the area, offering a glimpse into Thailand's early history and architecture.

Trang

Relatively few Thai people have ventured to this remarkably scenic part of their own country, which, while blessed with natural beauty, remains one of Thailand's hidden gems. Unlike Phuket's bustling airport, Trang's peaceful airport (opened in 1999) handles just a few flights each day, with Thai businessmen and locals far outnumbering overseas visitors. The nearby seaport of Kantang, with its charming 19th-century train station, marks the end of the South-western Thai railway, offering a tranquil, "end-of-the-line" feeling, a world away from the noise and pollution of Bangkok, located about 830 kilometers and 15 hours away by train.

In Trang, visitors can enjoy serene beach lounging and breathtaking sightseeing attractions without the over-commercialization typical of many tourist destinations. With over two-thirds of the province designated as national parkland, future development is likely to be shaped by thoughtful ecological considerations, ensuring the preservation of its natural charm.

Ubon Ratchathani

Located in northeastern Thailand, on the border with Laos, Ubon Ratchathani is a region predominantly made up of forests and farms, perfect for nature exploration. Its national parks offer opportunities to discover Thailand's unique fauna and flora, providing a rich natural experience. As a former part of the Khmer Empire, the area is also home to several ancient Angkorian temples, adding a historical and cultural depth to the region's natural beauty.

Udon Thani

Located in northeastern Thailand, less than a hundred kilometers from Vientiane (Laos), Udon Thani is the country's fourth-largest city. It gained fame during the Vietnam War as the site of one of the largest U.S. military bases in the region. Today, the city is also known for its abundant surrounding parks and archaeological sites, making it an excellent destination for nature lovers. The Ban Chiang archaeological site, in particular, is a UNESCO World Heritage site, offering fascinating insights into ancient civilizations.