

Northern Thailand and Laos Hill Tribe Cultural Tour

Itinerary dates: March 25 – April 6, 2017

Tour Leader: Patricia Andersson

HIGHLIGHTS

- * Visit **Bangkok's most popular sights**
- * Immerse yourself in **hill tribe village life** in Northern Thailand and Luang Prabang, Laos
- * Visit some of the **most beautiful temples** in all of Southeast Asia
- * Rise early to see a procession of **robed monks accepting alms**
- * Enjoy **cooking classes** in Bangkok and Luang Prabang
- * Take a **leisurely ride on the Mekong River** on a traditional boat
- * Returning WanderTours participants **receive a 5% discount** on land costs
- * **Tips** for in-country guides and drivers **included** in price

ITINERARY

Day 1

Saturday, March 25, 2017 – Bangkok

Meals: None

Day 1 is your arrival day into Bangkok. Most flights arrive late at night so it's unlikely you'll have time for sightseeing on this day, unless you arrive ahead of the tour or during daylight hours. Get a good night's sleep and be ready for adventure the next day!

If you would like help in booking transportation to your hotel, let us know. We're happy to help with arrangements.

Overnight in Bangkok at [The Landmark Bangkok](#) or similar.

Day 2

Sunday, March 26, 2017 – Bangkok

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

After an early breakfast, we'll head to **Wat Pho** to experience the monks' early morning chanting ritual. Wat Pho is one of the oldest Buddhist temples in Bangkok and is home to the famous 150-foot **reclining Buddha**. Also at the temple is one of the country's first schools of **traditional Thai massage**.

We'll then continue to The **Grand Palace**, the official residence of the King of Thailand. Here we'll visit another of Bangkok's most amazing Buddha statues – the beautiful **Emerald Buddha**, considered the most revered Buddha statue in Thailand.

After a traditional Thai lunch, we'll visit the **Jim Thompson House**, a stunning teak residence that was the home of a charismatic American silk merchant. It includes **several traditional teak buildings** set

amid a leafy compound right in the city. We'll tour the house and learn about Thompson's importance in the silk trade.

Dinner is on your own. There are many options in the area where the hotel is located. You might even consider a massage tonight!

Overnight in Bangkok at [The Landmark Bangkok](#) or similar.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Bangkok is a **vibrant city** with a tremendous number of sights to see and delicious food to eat. Today, we'll get an excellent sampling of the city's very best.

Day 3

Monday, March 27, 2017 – Bangkok

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

After breakfast, we'll head to a **Bangkok market** to purchase ingredients for today's **cooking class!** At the Blue Elephant Cooking School, we'll learn how to prepare a variety of popular Thai dishes with an entertaining Thai chef. The class will be followed by a meal at the school's restaurant where we'll get to sample the tasty Thai food you've just created.

The afternoon is free for shopping and/or sightseeing on your own. Go forth and choose your own adventure! You'll meet up with the group again for a lovely evening outing.

After a day of touring in this vibrant metropolis, we'll enjoy dinner at The Gardens Restaurant. This modern and chic restaurant/café **blends seamlessly into its surroundings.** The Gardens is known for its outdoor greenery as well as its fauna including white peacocks, white rabbits and white swans. It really provides a **calm and relaxed ambiance** in the midst of Bangkok.

Overnight in Bangkok at [The Landmark Bangkok](#) or similar.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Thai food is fantastic. Today you'll get to **experience authentic Thai cooking** and bring home recipes from a meal you've prepared yourself.

Day 4

Tuesday, March 28, 2017 – Bangkok – Chiang Mai

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

After breakfast, we'll be met by our guide and transferred to the airport for our flight to **Chiang Mai** in Northern Thailand.

Upon arrival, our guide and driver will take us to our hotel for check-in. We'll then have lunch at **Just Khao Soy** for a Northern Thai meal.

After lunch and before an afternoon of touring, we'll visit **WEAVE Foundation**, an organization that helps indigenous peoples (mainly women and children) along the Thailand/Myanmar border.

In the afternoon, we'll take a tour that showcases the best of ancient **Chiang Mai**, including its **old city walls, gates, moat and markets.** We'll visit **Wat Suan Dok** (where the ashes of Chiang Mai's royal family are interred) and **Wat Phra That Doi Suthep**, the most sacred temple in Northern Thailand that's

also called “the temple on the mountain.” In the late afternoon, we’ll partake in a **private blessing ceremony** and witness the magical **evening chanting of the monks**.

In the evening, we’ll enjoy a traditional **khan toke dinner** accompanied by **Northern Thai folk dancing**. Toke is a meal of Northern Thai dishes served on low, circular tables called toke.

After the dinner, we’ll get to light a floating **Khom Loy lantern** and launch it into the cool evening air. Tradition holds that by doing this, all your misfortunes will float away.

Overnight in Chiang Mai at [Royal Princess](#) or similar.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** You’ll love **Khao Soy**, a curried noodle dish that was once popular as a street food, but is now a **signature dish** in the region. Meals are served in specially designed serving sets that consist of eight small ceramic dishes, placed around a large bowl and set on an artist’s palette.

Day 5

Wednesday, March 29, 2017 – Chiang Mai

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Expect a special treat on Day 5! After breakfast, we’ll depart for the **Elephant Nature Park**, about an hour away. This park is a **rescue and rehabilitation center** for abused and neglected Asian elephants. At the park, elephants are taken care of and not used for entertainment or riding.

We’ll learn about the elephants of Southeast Asia and about their care, treatment and training. We’ll also have a chance to get up close and personal with the elephants, as we **feed and bathe** them!

* Note – consider bringing an extra set of clothes as you’ll get wet while bathing the elephants. Shorts and a t-shirt are best. No bathing suits, please.

In the evening, our guide will take us to the **Night Market** in the center of Chiang Mai. We’ll get to walk through stalls selling **local crafts, clothes, souvenirs, fresh fruit and more**.

Dinner’s on your own tonight. You might choose to snack at the market or have a sit-down meal at one of the many fantastic restaurants in Chiang Mai.

Overnight in Chiang Mai at [Royal Princess](#) or similar.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** You’ll enjoy being around these **truly extraordinary elephants** and learning about what the Elephant Nature Park is doing for them.

Day 6

Thursday, March 30, 2017 – Chiang Mai – Mae Kham Pong

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

In the morning, we’ll depart for the village of **Mae Kham Pong** about 1.5 hours away. Along the way, we’ll enjoy views of the **picturesque countryside** outside of Chiang Mai. En route, we’ll also stop at a local market for fresh ingredients for the evening’s dinner at your host’s home. The village is situated at about 4,000 feet elevation and has only about 500 residents.

Upon arrival in the village, we'll stroll through the forest, where we'll pass **tea and coffee fields** on the way to a **waterfall**.

We'll return to the village for lunch prepared by our hosts and then have some time to relax in the afternoon with a traditional Thai massage. Afterward, we'll help our hosts prepare the evening's meal.

Overnight in Mae Kham Pong, which is a homestay in the village!

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Mae Kham Pong is a **charming village** in the mountains where the locals are friendly and welcoming to visitors. You'll enjoy the peacefulness of the surroundings as well as the hospitality of this small community.

Day 7

Friday, March 31, 2017 – Mae Kham Pong – Chiang Rai

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

We'll enjoy a hot breakfast at our homestay before taking a walk through the village to see how tea leaves are fermented as well as explore some other products made in the village. We'll then head onward through the mountains to **Chiang Rai** and have lunch along the way.

In the evening, we'll go to the **Chiang Rai Night Bazaar** where you can explore on your own and sample some **local snacks or have dinner**. Here you can also shop for handicrafts.

Overnight in Chiang Rai at [Laluna Hotel & Resort](#) or similar.

Day 8

Saturday, April 1, 2017 – Chiang Rai

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

We'll start the day at the Hill Tribe Museum where the curator will offer some insights on the different hill tribe communities in the region.

Afterward, we'll take a short drive (about 40 minutes) to Mae Chan district, where we'll visit **Akha** and **Yao hill tribes** in the small town of **Ban Pa Kam**. We'll then continue on to a Padaung (**long-neck Karen**) village in **Ban Ya Pha**. A short walk into the forest will lead us to a new Padaung settlement where villagers migrated from southern Burma just a few years ago. We'll have a chance to **visit with the villagers**, who survive by hunting, farming and selling their handicrafts.

We'll then continue to **Doi Mae Salong** and visit the **Santikiri Kuo Min Tang** Chinese refugee settlement. We'll see tea and coffee plantations, and also visit local stores where villagers sell homemade wine and locally grown products.

We'll return to the hotel in the late afternoon and you will have dinner on your own.

Overnight in Chiang Rai at [Laluna Hotel & Resort](#) or similar.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** There are at least **10 different hill tribes** in the region and we'll see a number of them on this day. Most originate from other parts of Southeast Asia and China and have landed in this (relatively) peaceful area as refugees.

Day 9

Sunday, April 2, 2017 – Chiang Rai – Chiang Mai

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

After breakfast, we'll visit the magnificent **Wat Rong Khun** (White Temple) before White Temple Chiang Raileaving Chiang Rai for **Chiang Mai** (approximately three hours by road).

Along the way, we'll stop for lunch at **Cabbage and Condoms**, a wonderful restaurant (with another location in Bangkok) operated by the Population and Community Development Association to **assist rural people with AIDS education**. We'll then continue on to Chiang Mai.

You'll have some time to explore in the afternoon as well as dinner on your own.

Overnight in Chiang Mai at [Royal Princess](#) or similar.

Day 10

Monday, April 3, 2017 – Chiang Mai – Laos

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

In the morning, we'll head to Chiang Mai airport for a short flight to Luang Prabang, Laos!


Upon arrival, we'll be met at the airport and transferred to our hotel for check-in.

Lunch will be on your own (with plenty of nearby restaurants to choose from) and you'll have the afternoon **free to explore the small downtown** of Luang Prabang.

In the evening, you'll meet back up with the group for the chance to participate in a unique, **traditional Lao Buddhist ceremony** called **Baci**. This is performed during important events such as weddings, births or to welcome guests. **It's meant to express good will and luck to others.**

After the ceremony, we'll enjoy **authentic Lao cuisine** at your hosts' home and have a chance to get to know these friendly locals.

Overnight in Luang Prabang at [Luang Prabang View Hotel](#) or similar.

 **HIGHLIGHT!** The Lao believe that each person has 32 spirits which constitute their spiritual essence. **Baci is the ritual used to call back any escaped spirits to the body.** During the Baci, special flower trays and food treats are prepared that are then touched by the participants while a **Buddhist mantra is chanted**. After the chanting, cotton threads are tied around the participants' wrists while they receive an **individual blessing**.

Day 11

Tuesday, April 4, 2017 – Laos

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today, join other early risers to **watch monks collecting their alms**. Each morning, the monks walk down the street collecting offerings from residents, business owners and even tourists. It's a lovely time that underscores the **importance of Buddhism** to the people of Laos. Once the procession is done, we'll return to the hotel for breakfast.

Afterward, we'll go to the historical area of Luang Prabang and tour some of the city's more popular sights. Our first stop is the **National Museum**, which houses art, artifacts and jewels, and provides an excellent overview of the country and culture. We'll also visit some of the most important temples including **Wat Visoun** and **Wat Xieng Thong**, the most revered temple in Luang Prabang.

We'll end the morning with a tour of the **Traditional Arts & Ethnology Centre**, a museum dedicated to the diversity of Laos' ethnic minorities. We'll then have lunch at **Le Patio Cafe**, the only restaurant in Luang Prabang that serves authentic ethnic cuisine.

In the late afternoon, we'll go to **Tamarind Restaurant** for an evening hands-on cooking class held in a **scenic outdoor kitchen** situated next to a lake. There, we'll prepare an **assortment of dishes** with an entertaining chef who will teach us **traditional techniques** and a bit about Lao culture along the way. The best part is that we'll get to eat all that we've prepared. Printed recipes will be provided.

Overnight in Luang Prabang at [Luang Prabang View Hotel](#) or similar.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Lao cuisine relies heavily on **fresh produce** and incorporates a range of **intriguing flavors**, many unfamiliar to the Western palate. You're sure to enjoy an evening of sampling a wide variety of flavors.

Day 12

Wednesday, April 5, 2017 – Laos

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

After breakfast, we'll head outside the city to tour **Hath Hient Village** to see the ancient art of forging iron knives.

We'll continue to **Ban Pickngai**, a **Yuan ethnic minority community** and then to the villages of **Ban Na Tan** and **Ban Kan Bohae**, where an **Khumu ethnic minority community** lives.

After visiting with these hill tribes, we'll have a **picnic lunch** near a beautiful **Hmong ethnic minority village**.

We'll then have a chance to **swim in the Nam Pa River**, one of the most scenic rivers in Laos. We'll drive along the riverbank to **Ban Bo Hae**, **Ban Tha Oui** and **Ban Kok Muang** to visit **Hmong villages**. We'll return to Luang Prabang in the afternoon for a rest from the heat.

Then, in the late afternoon, we'll board a **traditional river boat** for a leisurely ride up and down the mystical **Mekong River**. We'll enjoy comfortable seats and views of the sun setting behind the mountains. The boat will moor and we'll have a dinner of traditional Lao dishes with live entertainment. Scriptures in Temple Luang Prabangon board.

Upon returning to town, we may have time to visit the **evening hill tribe market** where dozens of stalls sell souvenirs, handicrafts and textiles.

Overnight in Luang Prabang at [Luang Prabang View Hotel](#) or similar.

★ **HIGHLIGHT! Luang Prabang** is a peaceful, provincial city that serves as the **spiritual capital** of Laos. There is little traffic on the roads and **monks in orange robes** are common sights throughout the area.

Day 13

Thursday, April 6, 2017 – Laos – Bangkok

Meal: Breakfast

Today we'll have a leisurely morning before departing for the airport for our flight to Bangkok.

**** Itinerary subject to change without notice.**