

# Northern Tribes & Challenges (9 days)

Thailand



**Please note: This itinerary can be modified to best suit your school's aims, learning objectives and budget.**

Northern Thailand is a land of rich traditions, where remote villages of unique ethnic minority tribes coexist with bustling cities. Here, opulent megamalls stand side by side with ornate temples and humble shanties. Vibrant lime-green rice paddies provide a scenic backdrop for street vendors pushing their carts, while orange-robed Buddhist monks navigate daily life with the latest smartphones.

This 10-day program is designed to broaden students' understanding of Asian cultures through team-building exercises and outdoor adventures. The itinerary showcases the country's contrasting cultures, beliefs, and development challenges at both local and regional levels.

A key highlight of the trip is a community service project where students work alongside local villagers to build a brick house or participate in habitat restoration for a hill tribe community in northern Thailand. A visit to an ethical elephant sanctuary will provide a deeper look into the balance between eco-tourism and sustainability versus exploitation and commercialism.

Other activities include a thrilling white-water rafting adventure, an energetic kickboxing session, and a hands-on Thai cooking class, ensuring an action-packed and engaging experience.

Designed to be both educational and enjoyable, this trip offers students a memorable introduction to a country rich in culture and opportunity, perfect for young, curious minds.

## Day 1

### Arrive Chiang Mai (Thailand)



Upon our arrival in Chiang Mai this morning, we are greeted by our tour leader, who accompanies us to our hotel. Along the way, we receive a detailed briefing on the itinerary and an introduction to travelling in Thailand, complete with a quick lesson in basic Thai phrases.

We then set out to explore Chiang Mai, a city that, despite its size, retains a charming rural atmosphere—more akin to a sleepy country town than a bustling urban hub. Travelling by tuk-tuk, we visit some of Chiang Mai's most notable landmarks, including the ancient brick moat, which dates back 700 years, and Wat Chedi Luang. Here, we admire the ancient

reclining Buddha and explore the working monastery, gaining an understanding of Buddhism's central role in Thai culture and daily life.

In the afternoon, we participate in a hands-on cooking class at a local farm, where we delve into the secrets of Thai cuisine. Renowned for its bold balance of spicy, sour, sweet, and salty flavours, Thai food is as complex as it is delicious. Guided by a skilled local chef, we begin with a tour of the farm's gardens, learning about the fresh produce, herbs, and spices that form the foundation of Thai cooking. Working in pairs, we prepare a selection of traditional dishes, which we then enjoy for dinner. (meals: lunch, dinner)

## Day 2

### Chiang Mai



This morning, we take an electric cart up to Chiang Mai's renowned Doi Suthep Temple, perched on a hillside with stunning views of the city. Here, we delve into the temple's rich history and local customs, including the tradition of ringing bells for good luck.

By mid-morning, we leave the city for an action-packed day of adventure. Our journey begins with a 12-kilometre mountain bike ride to the entrance of Sri Lanna National Park and Mae Ngat Lake. This man-made lake, known for its crystal-clear waters, plays a vital role in supplying water to the Chiang Mai region.

We then board a speedboat to cross half the length of the lake, arriving at a recreational area where we spend the afternoon swimming and kayaking. After a fun and active day, we return to the mainland by longboat and take a bus back to Chiang Mai.

Note: The bike ride is suitable for students of average fitness who are comfortable riding a bike. The route is mostly flat, with a gentle incline towards the end. The Mae Ngat Lake leisure area offers toilets, showers, changing rooms, and a small restaurant for convenience. (meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner)

## Day 3

### Chiang Mai



We begin the day with an early morning Muay Thai class, taking advantage of the cooler hours before the heat sets in. Muay Thai, Thailand's national sport, has been a cornerstone of Thai culture for centuries. Known for its unique close-combat techniques, it provides an energetic and engaging workout. Under the guidance of professional instructors, we warm up thoroughly before learning key defensive and offensive moves. The session culminates in sparring practice with professional fighters.

After breakfast at the hotel, we set off for the Mae Taeng Valley to experience the thrill of white-water rafting. As we navigate the river's rapids, we are surrounded by the beauty of the Thai rainforest, steep valleys, and towering bamboo groves. Along the way, we may spot herds of elephants at the water's edge, adding to the magic of the experience. In the afternoon, we visit an eco-village nestled in a valley, home to various ethnic minority groups, including the Long Neck Karen. Renowned for their distinctive golden neck coils, the Karen people have a rich and complex history, with many having fled Myanmar in the 1990s due to conflict. In a group discussion, we

explore the ethical considerations of tourism, the challenges faced by refugee communities, and the balance between commercialism and sustainability in the village.

We return to the city in time to explore one of Chiang Mai's vibrant night markets. These bustling bazaars offer a lively atmosphere, with rows of stalls selling everything from handcrafted souvenirs to imitation designer goods. (meals: breakfast, lunch)

## Days 4, 5, 6 & 7

### Chiang Dao



We leave Chiang Mai and travel to the hill tribe region of Chiang Dao, a northern Thai province that has become a refuge for many Karen and Palong ethnic groups who fled Myanmar in the 1990s. Over the next four days, we will take part in a meaningful community project, constructing a brick house\* for a family in need of safe and secure accommodation. Working alongside local tradespeople and villagers, we will engage in hands-on building tasks such as bricklaying, cement mixing, basic carpentry, and landscaping—and, of course, plenty of bucket carrying! Along the way, we gain insight into the house-building project selection process and the logistical challenges involved in completing such a

significant undertaking.

Beyond the construction work, we immerse ourselves in the culture and history of the Palong people, whose traditions differ significantly from those of mainstream Thai society. A visit to a local primary school provides a firsthand look at the challenges faced in ethnic minority education, while an introduction to village life highlights traditional farming methods and the daily struggles of the community.

Note: Facilities in the village are basic. Each longhouse provides a thin mattress, pillow, and mosquito net, with communal sleeping arrangements. Showering facilities are simple with lukewarm water, and toilets are squat-style. Sturdy walking shoes or boots are essential. (meals: 4 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 4 dinners)

\*As an alternative to the collaborative house building project, we can participate in a habitat rejuvenation project where students improve the natural water source's habitat by planting native bushes and trees, providing a home, shelter, and food for wildlife. Conversely, we may choose to help improve the village water storage and distribution system, repairing water piping and building new water storage reservoirs.

## Day 8

### Chiang Dao – Chiang Rai



This morning, we complete our community project and participate in a handover ceremony, officially presenting the new house to its owners. Over the next few days, local tradespeople will complete the final fixtures and fittings. After bidding farewell to the village, we begin our journey north to Chiang Rai, stopping along the way at the renowned White Temple. A stunning fusion of art, devotion, and Buddhist symbolism, this architectural marvel is brought to life through our tour leader's insightful explanations as we explore its intricate details. Upon arriving in Chiang Rai, we reflect on its historical significance as a former hub of the global opium trade. Today, however, Chiang Rai is

known for its warm hospitality, vibrant night markets, and delicious local cuisine. This evening, we immerse ourselves in the lively market atmosphere. (meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner)

## Day 9

### Depart Chiang Rai



Today, we journey to Thailand's renowned "Golden Triangle" region, historically one of the world's largest opium-producing areas. Here, we ascend a small hill offering panoramic views of the meeting point of Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos. A key highlight of this visit is the Opium Museum, an impressive facility funded by the Royal Project. Through immersive displays and storytelling media, the museum chronicles the history of opium, the devastating impact of narcotics, and the comprehensive measures taken by the Thai government and the King's mother to eradicate this harmful trade.

In the afternoon, we visit a well-regarded elephant sanctuary to learn about conservation initiatives, habitat preservation, and the complex relationship between elephants and tourism. We also have the unique experience of walking alongside these magnificent animals through the forest, gaining a deeper appreciation for their importance in Thai culture and ecology.

Our journey concludes as we return to Chiang Rai airport, where we bid farewell to our tour leader. From here, we fly to Bangkok to connect with our international flight home. (meals: breakfast, lunch)



## Summary

### Grading

**Challenging;** To get the most out of this trip, you need to be in very good health and have a high-level of fitness. The itinerary may include camping, strenuous work and challenging tasks. Some outdoor activities include physical exertion and long periods exposed to the elements. You will be expected to walk every day and carry your luggage. If your itinerary includes community service work of any description, you will be expected to work diligently during this component. Conditions here may be very basic with simple accommodation and bathroom facilities. Suitable packing lists will be provided to match the content of the itinerary.

### Accommodation

School tours: Student accommodation is on a twin/triple share basis. Teacher accommodation is on a single room basis. Hotels usually hold a 3-star equivalent rating. Separate sleeping areas and bathrooms are provided for boys, girls, and staff members at homestays.

### Transport

Depending on the tour, modes of transport may include modern air-conditioned private coach, boat, train, plane.

### Your Tour Leader

A tour leader accompanies all group tours. Your tour leader is the person who most influences the success of your trip. They have been meticulously trained and are very experienced in running tours. Every tour leader is locally employed, therefore they are the best person to showcase their country and culture. Their expertise and knowledge creates an insightful and authentic experience of the region. They are with you throughout your trip from breakfast time until the group returns to the hotel in the evening. They are contactable 24/7.

For more information on the role of the tour leader, local guides and accompanying teachers, please refer to our website.

### Group Size

School tours: Minimum group size is 16 students with a minimum of 2 staff members.

There are no maximum participant numbers on any tour.

### Service-Learning Programs

The local community instigates all our service-learning programs in response to their genuine needs and goals. Every program is conducted only after careful consultation with local community leaders and authorities.

We assess each program during the consultation process to ensure that it's sustainable, ethical, and empowers local people. Each project is designed to have lasting economic benefits that build wealth within the community – we're not in the business of tokenistic hand-outs.

- **Physical construction projects.** These projects include building, repairing or improving housing, schools,

libraries, washroom facilities or other infrastructure and fittings. We also work with communities that require water reservoirs, irrigation systems and animal pens.

As you can imagine, these projects require lots of physical exertion, sweat and some exposure to the elements. Undertaking a construction project involves hiring expert local tradespeople, assistant builders and transport providers. More substantial construction projects require purchasing locally produced materials, hiring cooks and booking local homestay accommodation, all of which inject money into the host community. Fundraising is usually required for these projects.

- **Environmental projects.** Our environmental projects are wide-ranging. They include activities such as: constructing greenhouses with suitable plants, planting cash crop gardens, such as mango and dragon fruit trees; constructing small dams; restoring native vegetation and habitat; setting up solar panels, installing fish farms, and maintaining conservation huts and hiking trails. By taking part in these projects, students will develop their environmental awareness. They'll learn about environmental impacts and discover ways to measure the lasting success of an environmental project. As with physical construction projects, fundraising is usually required for these projects.

For more details about our service-learning programs, please refer to our website.

## Trip Cost and Details

Cost per traveller from A\$ 1,850

Based on a minimum of:  
16 students & 2 accompanying teachers/staff members.  
\*Smaller or larger group sizes priced on application

### Inclusions

- All accommodation, transport, activities, entrance costs and other programs as described in the itinerary
- Professional Adventure Travel tour leader throughout the trip & additional specialist guides
- Extensive destination-specific risk management and assessment
- Meals (and drinking water) as listed in the itinerary
- 24-hour **IN COUNTRY** support
- Pre-departure support, briefings and planning meetings
- Tips for tour leaders, local guides & drivers

### Exclusions

- International flights to/from Thailand
- Travel Visa costs (if required)
- Cost of Community projects/Service-learning programs \$3800
- Spending money
- Travel insurance

## Contact details

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