

# Thailand Travel Guide

A polished 10-day route with real travel photography, hotel recommendations, booking links, and practical costs.



Designed around the cleanest first-timer route: Bangkok for temples and river life, Chiang Mai for northern culture, and the Andaman coast for limestone cliffs, boats, and island light.

## **Companion article: Top 10 Things to Do in Thailand**

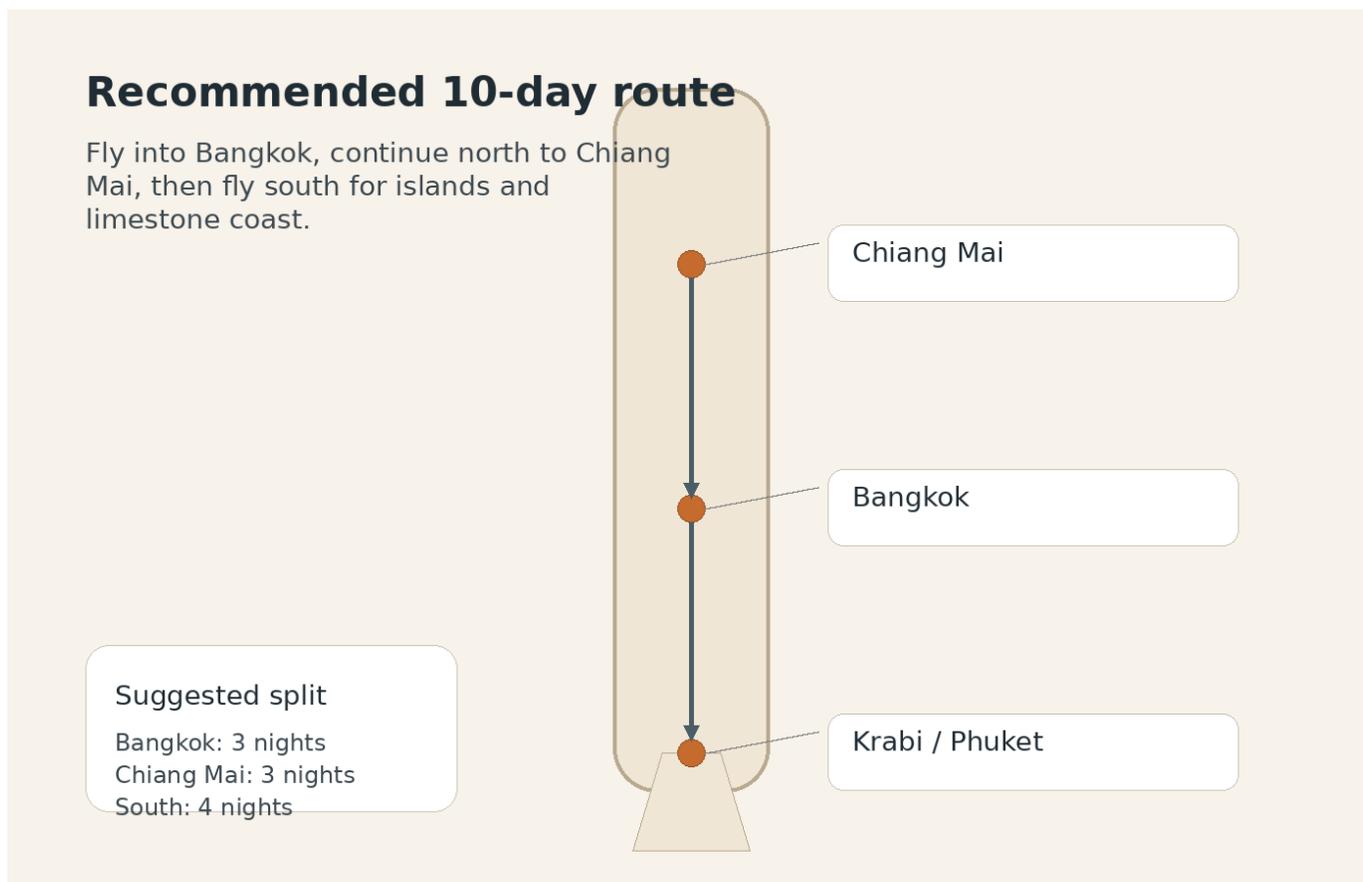
Use this guide as the downloadable version of that post. The structure is intentionally practical: what to do, where to stay, what it costs, and how to move through the country without travel chaos.

## How to use this guide

This is the efficient version. Instead of trying to see all of Thailand in one overstuffed blur, build the trip around three anchors. Bangkok gives you royal architecture, river transport, and night food culture. Chiang Mai adds mountain air, temple courtyards, and slower pacing. The south supplies the postcard stuff: long-tail boats, karst cliffs, and warm sea.

### Best seasonal window

The most comfortable broad window is generally November through February. March to May can be brutally hot. Rainy season can still be very usable, but it adds more itinerary risk for island days and outdoor photography.



*Recommended pacing: 3 nights Bangkok, 3 nights Chiang Mai, 4 nights south. That gives enough time to feel each place instead of merely ricocheting off it like a caffeinated pinball.*

# Bangkok

Bangkok is easiest to enjoy when you stop fighting its scale. Pick a riverside base or one transit-connected neighborhood, do the major temple cluster in the morning, and use evenings for food and skyline views.



*Grand Palace and Wat Phra Kaew. Photo via Wikimedia Commons.*

## Do not miss

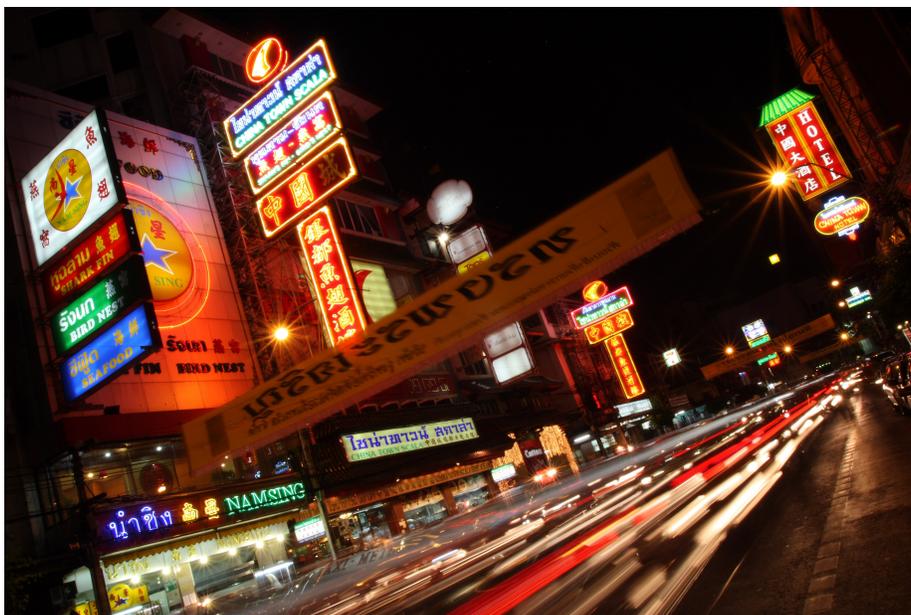
Grand Palace and Wat Phra Kaew at opening time; Wat Pho after; a Chao Phraya river ferry or private long-tail ride; Yaowarat at night for classic Chinatown energy; one rooftop or riverfront dinner on your first or last evening.

## Photography note

For architecture, arrive early. Hard mid-day light turns delicate temple detail into glare soup. A medium zoom is enough for most of Bangkok; longer focal lengths help compress temple roofs and river traffic.

## Bangkok planning details

Stay near the river if you want atmosphere and easy access to the palace zone. Stay near a BTS or MRT station if efficiency matters more. The sweet spot for many travelers is a hotel with river views plus easy car access when Bangkok decides to become Bangkok.



Yaowarat Road at night. Photo via Wikimedia Commons.

Hotel	Why it works	Rate snapshot	Official booking
Chatrium Hotel Riverside Bangkok	Strong riverside value, large rooms, easy access	From THB 600/night Bangkok, Thailand	<a href="http://www.breakfast.com/chatrium-hotel-riverside-bangkok">http://www.breakfast.com/chatrium-hotel-riverside-bangkok</a>
Capella Bangkok	Top-end riverfront luxury with balcony-facing river views	Views pricing Check live data	<a href="https://capellahotels.com/en/">https://capellahotels.com/en/</a>
Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok	Historic classic for splurge travelers who want old-world riverfront glam	Premium pricing Check live data	<a href="https://www.mandarinoriental.com/bangkok">https://www.mandarinoriental.com/bangkok</a>

Booking tactic: for Bangkok, compare one value-forward riverside stay with one luxury splurge. The city often rewards spending more on location rather than simply more on marble.

# Chiang Mai

Chiang Mai changes the rhythm. The pace slows, the streets narrow, and the trip becomes less about conquest and more about texture: temple bells, cafes, markets, mountain views, and northern Thai food.



*Wat Phra That Doi Suthep. Photo via Wikimedia Commons.*

## Core plan

Use one day for the old city temple circuit, one for Doi Suthep and a slower afternoon, and one for either an ethical elephant sanctuary, cooking class, or mountain countryside day. Night markets are best treated as evening texture, not a military campaign.

## Photography note

Temples photograph best in the first light or late afternoon. Gold surfaces can blow out easily. Expose for highlights and let the shadows stay a bit mysterious. The camera gods will survive.

# Chiang Mai planning details

Where you stay changes the whole mood. Inside or near the old city keeps temples and cafes close. Riverside properties feel calmer and more resort-like. For a 3-night stop, both can work beautifully.

Hotel	Why it works	Rate snapshot	Official booking
137 Pillars House Chiang Mai	Elegant boutique luxury with strong design character	From THB 20,900 per night	Link to official website
Anantara Chiang Mai Resort	Riverfront setting, polished service, and a good fit for side-of-the-road	From THB 7,000 per night	Link to official website
InterContinental Chiang Mai The Grand River	More river-upscale choice with central access	From THB 10,000 per night	Link to official website

Useful add-ons in Chiang Mai: an ethical elephant day, a cooking class, or a spa half-day. One major activity per day is enough. North Thailand is not improved by frantic overachievement.

## The south: Krabi, Railay, Phi Phi, and nearby islands

This part of the trip is where Thailand starts looking indecently photogenic. Limestone towers erupt from the sea, long-tail boats become moving color accents, and even mediocre weather often remains beautiful.



*Pileh Lagoon, Phi Phi Le. Photo via Wikimedia Commons.*



*Railay Beach panorama. Photo via Wikimedia Commons.*

### Best structure

Base in Krabi or Railay if you want dramatic scenery and boat access. Base in Phuket if you want a larger resort scene, more nightlife, and easier international connections. For many first-timers, Krabi gives the stronger visual payoff.

## Where to stay in the south

The southern segment can go in two different directions. One is serene scenery and boat-based exploring. The other is broader resort infrastructure with easier family logistics. Choose one personality and lean into it.

Hotel	Why it works	Rate snapshot	Official booking
Rayavadee, Krabi	Classic splurge option with direct access to Railay. The best 200+ acre private island off Krabi.	Rayavadee.com	<a href="http://www.rayavadee.com">http://www.rayavadee.com</a>
InterContinental Phuket Resort	Luxury beach resort on Kamala Beach with easy access to the Greek islands.	InterContinental.com	<a href="https://www.ihg.com/intercontinental">https://www.ihg.com/intercontinental</a>
Holiday Inn Resort Phuket	Family-friendly Patong base with strong facilities and a private approachable island.	HolidayInn.com	<a href="https://www.ihg.com/holidayinnresorts">https://www.ihg.com/holidayinnresorts</a>

Boat-day reality: the prettiest islands are best very early or outside peak holiday congestion. A private or semi-private day costs more but can radically improve the experience and the photos.

## Day-by-day itinerary: Days 1 to 3

### Day 1 - Arrive in Bangkok

Check into a riverside or transit-friendly hotel. Keep the first evening simple: riverfront dinner, rooftop drink, or a short walk through a nearby neighborhood.

### Day 2 - Palace and temples

Start at the Grand Palace and Wat Phra Kaew, continue to Wat Pho, and use the river for transport where possible. Evening: Yaowarat for food.

### Day 3 - Flexible Bangkok day

Choose one: long-tail canal ride, museum time, shopping, or a day trip to Ayutthaya if you want ruins and historical atmosphere.

### Pacing advice

Bangkok rewards selectivity. Three major stops in a day is plenty. Beyond that, the city turns your elegant itinerary into abstract expressionism.

## Day-by-day itinerary: Days 4 to 6

### Day 4 - Fly to Chiang Mai

Fly north, settle in, and spend the late afternoon in the old city. Keep dinner local and unpretentious. Northern Thai food is not a side quest.

### Day 5 - Doi Suthep and city temples

Visit Doi Suthep early, then return for Wat Chedi Luang or Wat Phra Singh. Evening at a market or calm riverfront dinner.

### Day 6 - Experience day

Choose one major activity: ethical elephant sanctuary, cooking class, or countryside exploration. Do not stack all three unless you enjoy being tired in a beautiful place.

## Day-by-day itinerary: Days 7 to 10

### Day 7 - Fly south

Travel to Krabi or Phuket. Keep this as a transfer-and-recover day. Sunset and a slow dinner are enough.

### Day 8 - Boat day

Take a Phi Phi or 4-island trip. Bring dry bags, sunscreen, and lower expectations for perfect solitude unless you paid for it.

### Day 9 - Beach or climbing day

Railay, kayaking, snorkeling, or simply a slower resort day.

### Day 10 - Return

Fly back to Bangkok if needed for onward departure, or continue internationally from the south depending on your route.

## What it costs

Thailand can be run at wildly different budget levels. The useful planning move is not asking whether Thailand is cheap. It is asking what parts of the trip you want to be cheap. Flights and luxury hotels are where bills jump. Food and everyday transport are usually kind to your wallet.

### Typical planning costs

#### Domestic flights

Bangkok-Chiang Mai: often about THB 2,000-4,000  
Chiang Mai-Krabi/Phuket: often about THB 2,500-5,000

#### Food

Street food: THB 60-180  
Casual sit-down meal: THB 200-500  
Fine dining: THB 1,500+

#### Tours

Ethical elephant day: THB 2,500-4,500  
Phi Phi / 4-island boat day: THB 1,200-3,500

#### Transport

Airport rail / metro / ferries in Bangkok are cheap.  
Private transfers add comfort but raise costs fast.

*Hotel rates shown in this guide are snapshots from official hotel offer pages when available and should be treated as directional, not sacred scripture. Live pricing changes constantly by date, season, and room type.*

## Direct booking links

### Bangkok

Chatrium Hotel Riverside Bangkok

Capella Bangkok

Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok

### Chiang Mai

137 Pillars House Chiang Mai

Anantara Chiang Mai Resort

InterContinental Chiang Mai The Mae Ping

### South

Rayavadee, Krabi

InterContinental Phuket Resort

Holiday Inn Resort Phuket

Direct-booking pages are useful for live rates, package offers, and cancellation terms. Aggregators are useful for comparison. The least romantic but most effective move is to check both.

# Packing and photography notes

## Practical packing

Temple visits require respectful clothing. Bring lightweight long sleeves, breathable trousers or long skirts, a real hat, reef-safe sunscreen, and a compact rain layer. Boat days reward dry bags, spare memory cards, and humility around electronics.

## For a travel photographer

A compact full-frame kit is ideal. In cities, use a mid-range zoom for architecture and food. In the south, a wider lens earns its keep for karst landscapes and beach scenes. If you carry a longer telephoto, it becomes a compression tool more than a necessity.

## Three best light windows

Bangkok temples: opening hour. Chiang Mai temples: early morning and late afternoon. Beaches and boats: last 90 minutes before sunset, plus blue hour for town scenes.

## Photo credits and usage note

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Thanon Yaowarat, Bangkok, Thailand (4245968169).jpg - yeowatzup - CC BY 2.0 - Wikimedia Commons.

A Long-tail Boat in Pileh Lagoon, Phi Phi Le.jpg - Puripant - CC BY-SA 4.0 - Wikimedia Commons.

Railay Beach - 0003-Pano.jpg - Stefan Fussan - Wikimedia Commons.

### Rate note

Hotel price mentions are directional snapshots from official offer pages when available. Always verify live pricing, taxes, service charge, breakfast terms, and cancellation policy before booking.

### Closing thought

Thailand does not need to be conquered. It needs to be edited. Pick fewer places, stay slightly longer, wake up early for the good light, and let the trip breathe. That is where the real magic hides.