



WEATHER



With its higher elevation, Chiang Mai enjoys a cooler climate than the stifling central plains near Bangkok. However during the hot season (March-May), the temperature can soar as high as 40°C at midday, cooling off significantly at night to around 22°C. The cool season (December-February) is the most popular time to visit Chiang Mai, weather-wise. The rainy season (June-October) is a mixed blessing for visitors, as the temperature falls to an average of 23-32°C, but it rains almost every day. **Best time to go:** November to February

<http://www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/info/weather.htm>

CURRENCY

Thai baht (THB). US\$1 = approximately THB 30.00
You'll find the current conversion rate at the top of the chiangmai.bangkok.com website.



TIME ZONE

GMT+7 (the same as Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam)



ELECTRICITY

Voltage is 220 volts 50Hz, using either two flat blades (NEMA 115 or JIS C 8303) or round two pin plugs (Europlug CEE 7/16).



IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS



- Police	191
- Tourist Police	1699, 053 248 130
- Ambulance	1669
- Fire	199
- Traffic Accident	1193
- Central Memorial Hospital	053 277 090-3
- Chang Puak	053 220 022
- Medical Emergency	1669
- Operator-assisted overseas calls	100
- Directory Assistance	1133
- Chiang Mai Airport	053 270 222-33, 053 20 3 300-19
- TAT Chiang Mai	053 248 604, 1672
- Immigration	053 277 510

CHIANG MAI GUIDE

YOUR FREE CHIANG MAI GUIDE
FROM THE ASIA TRAVEL SPECIALISTS

Chiang Mai is a land of misty mountains and colourful hill tribes, a playground for seasoned travellers, a paradise for shoppers and a delight for adventurers and Songkran revellers. Located 700km north of Bangkok in a verdant valley on the banks of the Ping River, Chiang Mai was founded in 1296 as the capital of the ancient Lanna Kingdom. Today it is a place where the past and present seamlessly merge with modern buildings standing side by side with temples.

Here the curious can expand their horizons with Thai massage and cooking courses; the aesthete will be bowled over by the variety of handicrafts; the wild child will find plenty of lively nightlife; and the epicure can indulge in wonderful cuisine.

SIM CARDS AND DIALING PREFIXES



Prepaid SIM cards are available for purchase at 7-Elevens and mobile phone shops at Chiang Mai Airport. You'll also find them at the service operator's shops in the city – DTAC, AIS and TRUE – or located inside CentralPlaza shopping centre Chiang Mai Airport. To make a call to a landline within Chiang Mai, dial 053 then the six-digit number. Making a call to Bangkok, dial 02 (area code), then the seven-digit number. Calls between mobile phones require the three-digit prefix (08x), followed by the seven-digit subscriber number.

GETTING AROUND



Chiang Mai is a fairly compact city, and walking around is a great way to appreciate its antique charm. Besides walking, the red song-taews (passenger-carrying trucks) are convenient, cheap and popular among locals and tourists alike. They usually follow standard routes but can take you to a specific destination. Flag the driver down, ask where they are going and hop in if your destination lies in the same direction.

A lot faster, but more expensive, are the tuk-tuks (motorised three wheelers). These usually crowd in ranks near major hotels and tourist areas. Car and motorbike hire are also readily available, and having your own vehicle is a great way to explore some of the attractions just outside of Chiang Mai. If you're happy grabbing a map and finding your own way, many hotels have bicycles you can hire or use for free if you're a guest.

<http://www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/info/getting-around.htm>

AIRPORT TRANSFERS



Getting from the airport to the city is very easy. If you have a lot of luggage, getting a metered taxi is a good option – simply contact the taxi desk located at the exit of both terminal buildings. For song-taews or tuk-tuks, walk all the way to the main street and flag down one, as the airport doesn't allow those without passengers to enter the premises. Better yet, catch one in front of the terminal buildings, from a disembarking passenger. There is also a bus service that departs every 20 minutes for the Old City.

Alternatively, you might want to consider hiring an airport limousine (or book ahead at www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/transfer.htm) or renting a car from the airport.

CHIANG MAI AREA GUIDES

Chiang Mai is jam-packed with dazzling architecture, historic temples and shops with a distinct Lanna ambience. Those who've been to Chiang Mai would agree that this northern Thai city has its own personality and cultural heritage, among the best-preserved in the country. Although it's a good idea to get familiar with its various areas, our best advice is to allow yourself to get lost and immersed in all the wonders that unfold around you.

1. Chiang Mai City and Old City

Chiang Mai's historical heart lies within the walled area about one kilometre west of the River Ping, so called the Old City. Many of the ancient Lanna temples and cultural attractions lie within these walls, as well as the Sunday Walking Street, and the best way to explore them is on foot or bicycle. The central part of Chiang Mai City fringes the Night Bazaar and Old City. In this area, the dense warren of shop houses still carry an essence of old world meets new world, with a multitude of contemporary and traditional merchandise shops, cafés, spas and riverside restaurants. Further west from the Old City, Nimmanhaemin Road has emerged as Chiang Mai's hippest area, full of one-off boutiques, galleries and great dining choices.



2. Night Bazaar

The main venue for shopping and nightlife in Chiang Mai, the Night Bazaar, is a must-see while in the city. Its epicentre is located at the intersection of Chang Khlan and Loi Khroh, but the whole area spreads out for two blocks in either direction. Set up time is around sunset (usually about 18:00) and the festive energy continues unabated until about 22:30, with a few vendors remaining open even later. Night Bazaar is also home to a wide range of accommodation, from budget guesthouses to luxury five-star. If you want to be in the middle of Chiang Mai's busiest commercial section, staying around the Night Bazaar won't disappoint.



3. Riverside-Wat Ket

The Riverside possesses all of the old-world charm Chiang Mai is so renowned for. The understated elegance of Thailand's second city shuns the development of five-star hotels along its riverbanks in favour of affordable eateries, boutique craft shops and live music venues. Granted, there is an element of luxury to the river, but unlike Bangkok's Chao Phraya, you are more likely to see locals and tourists dining out together as it is slightly less elitist, and the first port of call for those looking for a good time. With an endearingly relaxed vibe, the riverside is a great reflection of the laid-back attitude held in the north of Thailand.



4. Nimmanhaemin Road

Nimmanhaemin Road has emerged as Chiang Mai's hippest area, laden with boutiques, galleries and great dining choices. If you have a special interest in picking up unique handicrafts, 'antiques', clothes or accessories, it's a good idea to spend an afternoon rummaging along the Nimmanhaemin, particularly Soi 1. This area is all about quality. The nearby Huay Kaew Road has a night market that is often packed full of students and teenagers shopping for the latest fashions at reduced prices. This road also has a high concentration of cafés, restaurants and cool bars with live music and a friendly atmosphere.



5. Hang Dong

Well-known as one of Chiang Mai's long-established craft centre, Hang Dong is home to Baan Tawai woodcarving village and lesser-known Muang Kung Pottery Village. Baan Tawai, about 18km south of the city centre, tempts you with all kinds of hand-carved wooden furniture, home accessories and custom-made crafts made to order. Although it has become commercialised over the years, Baan Tawai remains a good source of local-style wood crafts and home décor pieces. Also in Hang Dong are the two family attractions, Chiang Mai Night Safari and the seasonal Royal Flora Ratchaphruek. While it's not necessary to stay overnight in Hang Dong, most accommodation here is resort-style and exudes a delightful, tranquil vibe.



6. Mae Rim-Mae Taeng

A haven for nature lovers, the verdant Mae Rim-Mae Taeng area boasts scenic mountain ranges, waterfalls, caves, flower gardens, elephant camps and numerous ethnic hill-tribe villages. The Mae Rim loop makes for an excellent day trip, as it offers a fascinating range of attractions that qualify as some of the best highlights of Chiang Mai. Slightly further north of Mae Rim, Mae Taeng is more remote and considered off-the-beaten-path; however the beauty of its forested mountains and serene countryside more than makes up for its tucked away location. Taking advantage of the surrounding scenery, many resorts in Mae Rim-Mae Taeng area are the luxury boutique type, with excellent landscape design and wellness facilities.



BEST LUXURY HOTELS



1. The Chedi Chiang Mai Hotel and Resort, Riverside ★★★★★

The Chedi redefines the essence of contemporary Lanna through its sophisticated design that evokes a sense of inner peace and calm. Every moment is a delightful retreat in itself, whether at the pool, one of the five dining venues or spa. All rooms and suites feature private courtyards, balconies and picturesque river views. The Chedi is part of the GHM hotel group's luxury resort collection.

<http://www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/chedi/>



2. Le Meridien Chiang Mai, Night Bazaar ★★★★★

European elegance meets graceful Lanna heritage. Le Meridien offers a lavish stay in the midst of Chiang Mai's vibrant downtown commercial area. Plush comfort and tasteful interiors are a given in all guestrooms. Dining at the four venues is an art for all the senses, whereas the wellness spa and outdoor pool with a view of surrounding nature complete the luxurious experience.

<http://www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/lemeridien-chiangmai>



3. Rachamankha Hotel, Old City ★★★★★

Inspired by the design of Wat Phra That Lampang Luang's main chapel – arguably Thailand's most beautiful Lanna-style temple – this 25-room design hotel is a haven of peace and relaxation. The interiors fuse Chinese, Lanna and Thai ethnic cultural heritage, with antiques and objets d'art placed throughout, as well as in the tastefully decked out guestrooms. Hotel facilities include a restaurant, bar, art gallery, swimming pool, wellness spa and souvenir boutique.

<http://www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/rachamankha/>

BEST BOUTIQUE HOTELS



1. The Rim Chiang Mai, Old City ★★★

Close to Suan Dok Gate on the west side, this 36-room hotel is housed inside a converted traditional Lanna estate. The interiors, decked out with dark wood, local art and silk, evoke a sense of serenity and elegance. All guestrooms feature a balcony, Wi-Fi internet access, LCD TV, mini-bar and 24-hour butler service. The main restaurant highlights classic Asian flavours, and a dedicated mixologist is on hand to whip up delicious cocktails from the extensive menu – to be enjoyed at the rooftop terrace or by the landscaped outdoor pool.

<http://www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/the-rim-chiang-mai/>



2. De Naga Hotel, Old City ★★★★★

Steps from the Tha Pae Gate, De Naga is an ideal base for exploring Chiang Mai's temples as well as its shopping and dining scene. The hotel envelops you in its elegant, contemporary Lanna interiors, where statement art pieces adorn the walls and public areas. Set in a lovely courtyard, the outdoor pool comes complete with a Jacuzzi. Enjoy traditional northern Thai fare, Asian dishes as well as a delectable selection of French and Italian cuisine from the main restaurant, bakery and café.

<http://www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/de-naga-hotel/>



3. Tamarind Village, Old City ★★★★★

Surrounded by ancient temples and quaint shopping streets, Tamarind Village takes its name from a magnificent 200-year-old tamarind tree that shelters the hotel in a shady embrace. Clever landscape design and well-planned outdoor spaces evoke the feel of serenity and privacy, while understated elegance sets the tone for the interior design in all 45 guestrooms and suites, set around a series of garden courtyards. The outdoor pool, open-air restaurant, souvenir boutique and luxurious wellness spa complete your relaxing stay.

<http://www.bali-indonesia.com/hotelpadma/>

More at <http://www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/hotels/top-10-hotels.htm>

BEST RESORTS



1. Rawee-Waree Resort & Spa, Mae Rim-Mae Taeng ★★★★★

Less than an hour's drive from the city, this expansive resort offers a scenic retreat amidst the foothills of Mae Taeng. Each guest villa, set in a garden, is decked out in a contemporary style, with hardwood furniture, ethnic crafts and hand-woven fabric enhancing the interiors. A large, freeform pool is sculpted to the landscape and houses an island where you'll find the main open-air restaurant with al fresco dining area. There's also a wellness spa, fitness centre, children's pool, Jacuzzi and a conference centre.

<http://www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/rawee-waree-resort/>



2. Siripanna Villa Resort, Chiang Mai City ★★★★★

Siripanna Villa Resort & Spa's 70 rooms and individual villas are set on an expansive landscaped garden, complete with a small rice field. All rooms are meticulously decked out to evoke the splendour of contemporary Lanna design. The lush green landscaping sets an ideal stage for indulging in a spa treatment, plunging in for a swim, or learning the secrets of Thai cooking. Dining at the three elegant venues brings you the tastes of Asian, northern Thai and creative tapas cuisine.

<http://www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/siripanna-villa-resort/>



3. Sukantara Cascade Resort & Spa, Mae Rim-Mae Taeng ★★★★★

An hour's drive north of Chiang Mai City, Sukantara Cascade Resort is a complete escape experience. Straddling a cascading waterfall and forest greenery, the 16 guest villas fuse Lanna and Chiang Mainese design elements and overlook dramatic panoramas of surrounding nature. There's little else that comes between you and the wilderness here. Unwind to the sounds of waterfalls and rustling leaves as you enjoy a therapeutic spa treatment, khantoke dinner in the natural garden or a dip in the riverside pool.

<http://www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/sukantara-resort/>

BEST BUDGET HOTELS



1. Imperial Mae Ping Hotel, Night Bazaar ★★★★★

At the Night Bazaar's doorstep, Imperial Mae Ping offers 371 well-appointed guestrooms with modern amenities and city views. The Royal Service Floor caters specifically to business travellers, featuring extra perks such as a butler service, express check-in and check-out, access to the Sky Lounge where you can enjoy complimentary drinks, snacks and use of the board room and library. For leisure travellers, the hotel offers two swimming pools, a fitness centre, wellness spa, shopping promenade and five eateries with multi-national cuisine.

<http://www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/imperial-mae-ping/>



2. Vieng Mantra Hotel, Old City ★★★

Steps from the Sunday Walk Street and Wat Chedi Luang, this charming property exudes a warm, cosy vibe. The hotel's three-storey building frames the landscaped outdoor pool, itself a refreshing oasis for relaxation throughout the day. All guest rooms blend natural textures and ethnic crafts in their contemporary-style interiors, complete with a balcony and modern amenities such as a DVD player, cable TV, mini-bar and Wi-Fi internet access. The small café serves a selection of Thai a-la-carte dishes.

<http://www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/vieng-mantra-hotel/>



3. Centara Duangtawan, Night Bazaar ★★★★★

This modest hotel under the Centara group offers rooms with city views, a good range of recreational and dining facilities and a great location in the midst of Night Bazaar's dynamic shopping scene. Rooms come in five categories, from Superior (36m²) to Business Plus (40m²) to the expansive Royal Suite (330m²). The outdoor pool with Jacuzzi overlooks the downtown skyline. There are also a diverse array of dining options, a fitness centre, jogging track and aerobic studio for health-conscious guests.

<http://www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/centara-duangtawan-hotel/>

More at <http://www.chiangmai.bangkok.com/hotels/top-10-hotels.htm>

WHAT TO SEE IN CHIANG MAI



Chiang Mai has both natural and cultural draw-cards. The city centre retains a 'small-town' intimate feel and houses numerous historic temples and attractions within walking distance of each other. Less than a half hour drive away, Chiang Mai's countryside and mountains offer limitless possibilities for nature exploration, as well as visits to many fascinating ethnic hill-tribe villages.

1. Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, Doi Suthep

Gleaming like a northern star from the heights of Doi Suthep, Wat Phra That Doi Suthep is a significant part of Chiang Mai's cityscape. On a clear day, the peak of its golden pagoda is visible from the opposite corner of the city, across the Ping River. The temple itself is an impressive embodiment of the Lanna culture and a spiritual centre that has attracted both worshippers and visitors from all over the world.

Open: 6:00-20:00 **Location:** 15km from city centre, on Highway 1004 **How to get there:** Take a songtaew from Chiang Mai University's Huay Kaew Road entrance



2. Chiang Mai Night Safari, Hang Dong

There's more to the night safari than exploring the three animal zones: the Savannah Safari, Predator Prowl and Jaguar Trail. You can hand-feed the animals, take photographs with the tiger cubs, shop for cute souvenirs, test your physical coordination at the dancing fountain (Fun Plaza), or enjoy the laser light show (highly recommended) after dark. The park is set on 1.2km² of natural land, about 12km from the city.

Open: 18:00-midnight **Location:** Ratchapruerk Rd., Hang Dong District **How to get there:** Hire a song-taew from the city centre



3. Wat Chedi Luang, Old City

Built sometime between 1385 and 1402, Wat Chedi Luang's massive pagoda is a distinctive feature of the Chiang Mai skyline. The temple's vast ground houses several structures of great cultural significance, including the city pillar (Intakin), main chapel (wharn) housing the principal Buddha image and a giant gum tree guarding the temple's entrance. On major Buddhist holidays, Wat Chedi Luang is where you can witness the beautiful evening candle procession.

Open: 6:00-17:00 **Location:** Phrapokkiao Rd. **How to get there:** About 10 mins walk from Tha Pae Gate



4. Wiang Kum Kam the Underground Ancient City

Located on a scenic Ping riverbank south of the city centre, Wiang Kum Kam was once submerged under the River Ping. This ancient city is dated back to the 8th-Century Haripunchai Kingdom and served shortly as the capital of the Lanna Kingdom. The centrepiece at Wiang Kum Kam is Wat Chedi Liam, with its Burmese-style pavilion and exquisite five-tiered chedi set on a square base – the signature Lanna style.

Open: 8:00-17:00 **Location:** about 5km southeast of the Old City, on Chiang Mai-Lamphun Highway **How to get there:** Hire a song-taew from the city centre



5. Mae Sa Elephant Camp

Having secured their names in the Guinness World Record, the elephants at the Mae Sa Elephant Camp are no ordinary beasts. Apart from going about their daily routine of bathing, eating, sleeping and just being domesticated elephants, these extremely intelligent animals have been trained to paint, play football, dance and perform a string of talent shows that will change the way you think about Thai elephants.

Open: 8:00-16:00 **Location:** Mae Rim-Samoeng Road (18km) **How to get there:** Hire a song-taew from the city centre



6. Doi Inthanon National Park

At 2,565 metres above sea level, Doi Inthanon is the highest peak in Thailand. The park, covering 482km², is a true jewel of natural beauty. It consists of rugged mountainous terrain blanketed by lush tropical forests and dotted with mighty rivers and majestic waterfalls. The park's protected status makes it a sanctuary for a wide range of animal species and it is perhaps the best place in Thailand for bird watching.

Location: About 106km southwest of Chiang Mai **How to get there:** Organised tours or treks are the best and safest option [Book now](#), call +66 (0)2 651 9515



7. Doi Pui Tribal Village and National Park

Doi Pui is 1,685m above sea level, and the highest peak in the Doi Suthep-Pui National Park. It features a number of waterfalls — many accessible from the Mae Rim-Samoeng Highway north of the Old City — and is home to a Hmong ethnic hill-tribe village as well as Phu Ping Palace — the current king's royal residence. Many travellers to Doi Pui National Park make a stop en-route at Wat Phra That Doi Suthep.

Location: 15km from city centre, on Highway 1004 (the drive up to Doi Pui takes 40-50 minutes) **How to get there:** Take a song-taew from Chiang Mai University's Huay Kaew Road entrance



8. Bo Sang Handicraft Village

The handcrafting of umbrellas and parasols in Bo Sang Village is known throughout the country and even abroad — so much so that the umbrella has become one of the symbols of Chiang Mai. Here, you'll find plenty of hand-painted umbrellas, tiny cocktail umbrellas, large parasols for gardens or patios and other handmade products — all made from sa paper (produced from the bark of the mulberry tree) in various designs and at reasonable prices.

Location: About 10km east of the city, on Route 1006 **How to get there:** Hire a song-taew from the city centre



WHAT TO DO IN CHIANG MAI



The vast expanse of Chiang Mai's lush, forested mountains offers a refreshing escape for those in search for tranquility or adventure. Many sites and activities are located outside the city centre, and one of the easiest ways to go about exploring them is through packaged tours, whether elephant trekking, white-water rafting, visiting hill-tribe villages, or touring ancient temples dotting the Old City area.

1. Trekking in Mae Wang Sanpathong

Mae Wang - Sanpathong – Duration: 8 hours

This one-day trekking experience has been designed to give you a taste of Chiang Mai's richly diverse natural landscape. A short ride from the city centre, you will arrive in Mae Wang, home to virgin forests, picturesque waterfalls and scenic trekking routes. Here, visit the Hmong and Karen hill-tribe villages, then explore the verdant jungles on foot, an elephant back and a bamboo raft. [Book now](#), call +66 (0)2 651 9515

2. Elephant Riding and Bamboo Rafting

Mae Taeng – Duration: 8 hours

Elephant lovers don't want to miss out on this one. Thai elephants are playful and loveable. They are big. They are smart and gentle. And did you know that they are artists too? Get to know them and you'll see for yourself. On this one-day tour, journey into the heart of Chiang Mai's highlands and learn the elephant's way of living, eating, playing, working and even painting. A relaxing bamboo rafting experience along the rustic Mae Taeng River completes this memorable day. [Book now](#), call +66 (0)2 651 9515

3. Chiang Rai and The Golden Triangle

Chiang Rai – Duration: 12 hours

This full-day tour invites you to trace the history and natural beauty along the Golden Triangle's trail, then delve into the riches along the banks of the Mekong at Chiang Saen – the birthplace of the ancient Lanna civilisation. Once a land filled with endless poppy fields, the Golden Triangle has put its past behind it and been reincarnated as a tourist hotspot, with a scenic backdrop overlooking the meeting of the Mekong and Ruak rivers, and the rolling hills of Burma and Laos. [Book now](#), call +66 (0)2 651 9515

4. Doi Suthep Temple with City & Temples

Doi Suthep and Chiang Mai city – Duration: 8 hours

In Chiang Mai, the past is not merely the stuff of stories and musty old history books – it is a very real part of everyday life. Every corner you turn, history unfolds, through hand-carved wooden door panels, chipped paint on a mural, creaking floors, or resonance of an ancient bell. Explore the charming lanes of the old city and go behind the façade of modernity to experience the true wonders of this ancient Lanna capital. [Book now](#), call +66 (0)2 651 9515

5. One-day Mahout Training

Hang Dong – Duration: 8 hours

You've watched elephants play football, bath in the stream, paint a beautiful flower and do all kinds of amazing things, but in the back of your mind, you still feel like you haven't seen enough. If you're wondering what a day at the camp feels like for these gentle giants, or itch to go behind the scenes and find out for yourself, this tour will tell you everything you ever want to know about Thai elephants. [Book now](#), call +66 (0)2 651 9515

6. 3 Days 2 Nights Trek in Mae Taeng

Mae Taeng – Duration: 3 days 2 nights

This three-day trek takes you off the beaten path and into the depth of Mae Taeng's wilderness, where you will have an opportunity to stay at different hill-tribe villages and learn about the tribe's traditional culture and way of life. You will trek through the jungles on foot, as well as on the back of an elephant, then float down the river on a bamboo raft. Beginners may find this tour a little rough at times, while advanced trekkers will feel right at home. [Book now](#), call +66 (0)2 651 9515

7. 3 Days 2 Nights Trek in Chiang Rai Golden Triangle

Chiang Rai – Duration: 3 days 2 nights

This three-day trekking expedition takes you from the southernmost tip of Chiang Rai to the northernmost border, where Thailand, Laos and Burma meet at the infamous Golden Triangle. Along the way, you will visit a natural hot spring, embark on a long-tail speed boat ride up the idyllic Mae Kok River, ride on elephant back through the forests and trek on foot to hidden waterfalls and a number of hill-tribe villages. A visit to the historic town of Chiang Saen completes the journey. [Book now](#), call +66 (0)2 651 9515

8. Whitewater Rafting on Mae Taeng River

Mae Taeng – Duration: 9 hours

Adrenalin-starved thrill seekers, be prepared to show off your paddle power. This wild whitewater rafting adventure delivers double doses of fun. Push your way through endless grade 3 and 4 rapids, as the river winds its way through the picturesque valleys and canyons of verdant Mae Taeng forests. Immerse yourself in the spectacular scenery and just go with the flow. Those who've tried it say they had an amazing time. But we say one way to find out is to try it out yourself. [Book now](#), call +66 (0)2 651 9515



WHAT TO EAT

Like its art, language and cultural heritage, Chiang Mai food is distinct from its cousins to the south and east. A much more pronounced influence from Burma and China is evident in northern cuisine, resulting in milder curries and the heavier use of ginger and turmeric. Khao Niao (sticky rice), instead of steamed rice, is the main staple at every meal and goes very well with a range of nam prik (chilli dips) unique to northern cuisine.

1. Khao Soi (Egg Noodle Curry)

Rich and savoury yellow curry noodle soup, served with spring onions, pickled cabbage and slices of lime. The egg noodles are of the flat variety, with a small handful of deep-fried portion added on top and also crushed into the broth for a toothsome texture. Choose from chicken, pork, or beef Khao Soi. Usually the portion is quite small, so you might end up ordering another bowl to fill up your stomach.



2. Khan Toke

Not a single dish but a signature Lanna dining experience. Served in a low teak tray that doubles as a table, the khan toke comprises a range of northern-style side dishes and a basket of sticky rice. Diners sit on the floor, and dig in with one hand. The modern version of khan toke is accompanied by a series of cultural performances such as folk music, finger-nail dance and tribal dances.



3. Sai Oua (Grilled Herb Sausage)

A fiery starter dish, sai oua is northern-style sausage made from ground pork, dried chillies, garlic, shallots and a range of pungent herbs and spices. It looks very similar to northeastern-style sausage when seen on a charcoal grill but tastes drastically different – sai oua is more meaty and rich with herbal aromas as well as chillies.



4. Nam Prik Ong/Nam Prik Nume (Red/Green Chilli Dip)

This green and red chilli dip duo is the most well-known among all the northern-style chilli dips. Made with roasted chilli spur peppers, the green chilli dip, or nam prik nume, is fiery and will leave your tongue burning after only the first bite. The red chilli dip, or nam prik ong, tastes slightly milder, with a tomato-based paste mixed with ground pork, chopped coriander, spring onion and dried bird's eye chillies. Both are usually eaten with crispy pork skin, steamed vegetables, or sticky rice.



5. Gaeng Hang Lay (Burmese-style Sweet Curry)

A yellow curry with a tamarind-based soup, pork chunks, shallots and shrimp paste. Its origins are in Burma, but the adapted northern Thai version uses less oil. With no coconut cream as the ingredient, the texture is less thick than green curry and rich with spices. Some might find gaeng hang lay an acquired taste.



6. Kanom Jeen Nam Ngeow (Rice Vermicelli with Soybean Curry)

Perhaps the most exotic looking among all the kanom jeen (spaghetti-like noodles), this popular northern dish consists of the kanom jeen in a pork-soybean curry (nam ngeow), served with fresh vegetables, kaeb moo (crispy pork skin), dried bird's eye chillies and a range of local condiments. The soup tastes rather light and refreshing, unlike other rich, coconut cream versions found in other regional kanom jeen dishes.



7. Miang Kham (Bite-sized Wrapped Snacks)

A traditional finger food, miang kham is a fun, do-it-yourself starter dish. One serving consists of fresh betel leaves (for wrapping), sweet syrup and a variety of fillings, usually sliced shallots, fresh red or green chillies, diced ginger, diced garlic, diced lime, dried small shrimp and roasted grated coconut. One bite can have all or some of the fillings – it's totally up to you.



8. Tam Khanun (Young Jackfruit Salad)

Refreshingly spicy, nutty and flavoursome, this healthy northern dish will wake you up from any slumber. The young, green jackfruit is boiled until tender, then shredded and stir-fried with a garlic-dried chilli-shrimp paste base and a handful of herbs. Take one bite and the rich sweet, sour, salty and nutty tastes will explode in your mouth.



WHERE TO EAT

Chiang Mai's dining scene is an eclectic blend of traditional northern Thai cuisine, regional Thai flavours and a wide range of multi-cultural offerings. Besides street-side eateries, many dining establishments also offer a cultural experience, whether through the ambience, interior décor, entertainment, history or food.

1. Tong

Tucked in a quiet soi (lane) just off the Nimmanhaemin artist strip, this open-air restaurant is one of the best places to sample tasty northern Thai cuisine in a pleasantly laid-back atmosphere. The extensive menu features a large variety of dishes whipped up from locally sourced vegetables and ingredients. The must-try dishes include kaeng hang le (northern Thai style curry), larb kua (fried minced pork salad), deep-fried chicken wings and nam prik (chilli dips).
Cuisine: Northern Thai **Open:** 11:00-midnight **Phone:** 053 222 207 **Location:** Nimmanhaemin Soi 13



2. The Gallery

This fine dining establishment is truly a unique place that combines the beauty of art and crafts with the art of cooking. Unmistakable, the neon-lit sign that sits outside immediately draws you in from the street to what appears to be a treasure trove of goods. Housed in one of the oldest wooden structures in Chiang Mai – it is thought to have been built in 1892. Try one of the curries on the menu, spiced up to your taste, the fish also comes highly recommended too.
Cuisine: Thai, international **Open:** 12:00-midnight **Phone:** 053 248 601-2 **Location:** 25-27-29 Charoenrat Rd.



3. Huen Pen

This long-time favourite restaurant has been serving up mouthwatering northern Thai fare for more than four decades. It serves one of the best khao sois in Chiang Mai, along with a range of northern Thai fare prepared according to the family recipe. The non-descript open-air section is open for lunch, whereas dinner is served in an atmospheric dining room bedecked with wooden sculptures, antiques and treasures. **Cuisine:** Northern Thai **Open:** 08:30-16:00, 17:00-22:00 **Phone:** 053 814 548 **Location:** Rachamanka Rd., inside the Old City wall



4. Huen Suntari

Well-known for its celebrity owner and folk singer Soontaree Vechanont, Huen Suntari is an ideal place to immerse yourself in an authentic Lanna experience, through its cuisine, music and ambience. The setting is by the River Ping, in a two-storey wooden house decked out in a lovely northern Thai style. The menu features both classic and specialty northern Thai fare, but the main highlight is the live music performance by the owner herself. **Cuisine:** Northern Thai **Open:** 16:00-midnight **Phone:** 053 872 707-8 **Location:** 208 Patan Rd. (north of city centre)



5. Khan Toke Dinner at Old Chiang Mai Cultural Center

While not a must-do, you might want to try a khan toke dinner at least once when in Chiang Mai. At the Old Chiang Mai Cultural Center, the setup is highly elaborate – from the elegant teakwood room decked out in ethnic Lanna style to the round teak tray containing nine side dishes to the sitting arrangement on the floor – all designed to re-enact the original khan toke experience. A cultural show, featuring ethnic hill-tribe dances, finger-nail dance and folk music performances, accompany the dining experience. **Open:** 18:45-21:30 **Phone:** 053 202 993-5 **Location:** Wualai Rd.



6. The Good View

This riverside resto-bar is an institution in Chiang Mai, due to a stunning riverfront location, quality live band entertainment every night and a fantastic menu of Thai, Japanese and international fare at reasonable prices. The wooded interiors give the place a warm, cosy, living room feel. There's also an al fresco garden terrace where you can wine and dine amidst an idyllic backdrop of the Ping River. **Cuisine:** Thai, Japanese, international **Open:** 10:00-1:30 **Phone:** 053 302 764, 053 241 866 **Location:** 13 Charoenrat Rd.



7. Charcoa Bakery & Restaurant

A gorgeous restaurant that will charm your socks off, both in setting and menu choices. The Thai dishes are delicious and spiced up to your preference, while the pad Thai has been labeled as one of the best in Chiang Mai by customers. The courtyard-cum-garden setting is romantic and nicely secluded. Breakfast comes highly recommended as does the B&B hotel to which it is attached. **Cuisine:** Thai, international, desserts **Open:** 7:30-21:30 **Phone:** 053 212 681 **Location:** Soi Sripoom 1 (inside Old City)



8. The House

If you feel like splashing out when in Chiang Mai then this is definitely a place you should think about going. World class in terms of design, service and food, it is a stunning restaurant experience. The overriding antique vibe is enhanced by the eclectic combination of textures, colour and hand-painted Chinese antique furniture. **Cuisine:** Thai, international **Open:** 18:00-22:30 **Phone:** 053 419 014 **Location:** 199 Moon Muang Road (inside Old City)



WHERE TO GO FOR NIGHTLIFE



Chiang Mai nightlife can be whatever you want it to be, the city offers a broad scope of drinking and dancing options, but for the most part live music venues have the monopoly. Chilling out at a riverside bar while the live band entertain with classic blues, jazz and rock tunes is a popular pastime. A hip, brash clubbing zone is found among the alleys of Nimmanhaemin Road, while a host of strip clubs, go-go bars and massage parlours are concentrated along Loy Kroh Road, just southeast of Tha Pae Gate.

1. Night Bazaar

The Chiang Mai Night Bazaar has a legendary reputation – it's the place to shop, eat, drink and just people watch after sunset. Countless stalls pack along the sidewalks and spilling out into the street, selling almost everything you can think of. Like the goods on sale, the nightlife here is varied. A handful of side-walk bars and western-style pubs are perfect for stopping and having a mid-shopping drink or resting while someone else wants to shop. **Location:** Intersection of Chang Klan and Loy Kroh roads **Best time to go:** After 20:00



2. Walking Streets

First it was the Sunday Walking Street, then the Saturday Wualai Walking Street. Closed to car traffic after midday, the Walking Streets are the best places to see and experience Chiang Mai in its own skin. All kinds of vendors – aspiring street entrepreneurs, hill-tribe peddlers, established shop-houses – and crafts fill the entire stretch. Street food, drinks and cultural entertainment are all part of the experience – it's one of the best ways to spend an evening in Chiang Mai. **Location:** Ratchadamneon Rd, Tha Pae Gate (Sunday), Wualai Road (Saturday) **Best time to go:** After 18:00



3. Live Jazz by the Riverside

Across the River Ping from the Night Bazaar, Charoenrat Road runs parallel to the riverside and is home to a line-up of atmospheric resto-bars with the city's best live music, with jazz, soul, reggae, and classic rock and roll tunes. Team this great atmosphere with the magnificent views and tasty food, and you can see why the Riverside is home to Chiang Mai's most sought-after nightlife spots. **Location:** Charoenrat Rd (between Charoen Muang and Kaew Nawarat)



4. Clubbing in Nimmanhaemin

Popularly known as Chiang Mai's hip street, Nimmanhaemin Road is filled with stylish galleries, art cafés, boutique shops and hotels with distinct personality. After sunset, it comes to life with a colourful range of chilled out bars, clubs and restaurants. For live music, dancing and a lot of local party vibe, the city's trendy types head to Monkey Club on Soi 9 (open 22:00-1:00) or the more youthful Warm Up, opposite Soi 17 (open 18:00-2:00).



5. Cabaret Show

Like Phuket, Bangkok and the rest of Thailand, in fact, Chiang Mai has its fair share of pretty ladyboys, and cabaret shows are the best places to spot the prettiest and most talented of them all. Themes range from the glamorous to the hilarious, but the shows are always entertaining. The two most famous Chiang Mai cabarets are Blue Moon Cabaret at 5/3 Moon Muang Road and the well-known Simon Cabaret, located at 177 G Building, 1st Floor, Chang Peuak Rd.



6. Loi Kroh's Go Go Strip

Just south of Tha Pae Gate, the short strip leading towards Night Bazaar is a jungle of girlie bars, massage parlours and go-go pubs with their prettiest staff members outside beckoning patrons like sirens. While some have labelled the strip brash, loud, with an in-your-face attitude, it's the place to go if you'd like some easy 'company'. Spotlight, on Chaiyapun Road, near Loi Kroh, has a large stage and a deliciously seedy vibe. For something with a little more style, head to Foxy Lady A Go Go behind Dusit D2 Hotel.



7. Old City Bars and Pubs

Nightlife inside the Old City wall has a more subdued vibe to it than the Riverside or the Night Bazaar, but still has potential for meeting people, enjoying a few drinks and the promise of live music. The U.N. Irish Pub on Ratvithi Rd (open 9:00-1:00) is laid-back, has good pub food, occasional open-mic nights and a friendly crowd of local expats. THC Rooftop Bar (opposite Tha Pae Gate, open 18:00-late) has a rooftop bar where you can kick your shoes off, lie down on some comfy cushions, get caned and listen to electronic music.



8. C.M. Entertainment Complex

An entire warehouse dedicated to adult nightlife, definitely not a place to bring your family. Easily spotted by the glowing red neon sign that says "Free Show", the complex houses some 30 girlie bars with pool tables and loud, throbbing music. There's also a cabaret show and a Muay Thai (Thai kick boxing) stadium in the middle where free shows are staged on most nights. **Location:** Loi Kroh Road, near Chiang Mai Night Bazaar



WHERE TO SHOP



Being Thailand's main handicraft centre, Chiang Mai is one of the few places where you can visit a factory or artisan's workshop, watch crafts people at work before buying, or even try your hand at craft making yourself. That said, rather than trendy shopping malls, Chiang Mai's shopping scene is more about open-air crafts markets, stand-alone boutique shops and gallery-style stores offering unique handmade goods.

1. Riverside Boutique Shops

Across the River Ping, a short section of Charoenrat Road makes for a pleasant stroll. A collection of renovated wooden shop-houses that line its short stretch specialise in Lanna art and crafts, mostly from high-end local brands. The shops themselves are architectural treasures, built more than a century ago. Even if you don't plan to buy anything, this area is well worth a visit just for its historical value and scenic riverside panoramas. **Location:** Charoenrat Rd. (between Charoen Muang and Kaew Nawarat)



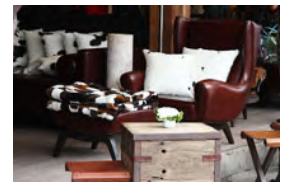
2. Chiang Mai Night Bazaar

The Night Bazaar consists of street-side stalls selling mostly counterfeit goods, T-shirts and handicrafts, and a host of shopping plazas where you can find more unique crafts and jewellery. A good way to check out the whole area is to start at Tha Phae Road and work your way south towards Loi Khro. Once you reach the end of the market, cross the street and work your way back along the other side. Don't forget to peek down the little sois (alleyways) and arcades along the way. **Location:** Intersection of Tha Pae and Chang Klang Roads **Best time to go:** After 19:00



3. Nimmanhemin Promenade

This hip artist street is more than just trendy – Nimmanhaemin sets trends for Chiang Mai's contemporary art and crafts scene. Soi 1, in particular, is the centre of boutique shopping. Explore its short but lively stretch for all kinds of crafts, from period-style wooden furniture to candle sculptures, bohemian clothing to abstract paintings, hand-woven textiles to creative paper products. The best time to come is in December, during the one-week annual Nimmanhaemin Art & Design Promenade, when a colourful, festive vibe sweeps over the entire alley.



4. Tha Pae Road

The old wooden shop-houses along Tha Pae Road, from Tha Pae Gate to Chang Klan, are home to an eclectic collection of crafts, including ethnic art, tribal fashion, silver jewellery, ceramics, home accessories and wooden crafts. Try Dan Collections (open 10:00-20:00) if you are looking for Buddha images and high-quality home furnishing. Lost Heavens (open 10:00-20:00) has a fascinating range of tribal art from around the region, from Tibetan textile to Yao embroidered silks.



5. Baan Tawai Wood Crafts

Baan Tawai, home to Chiang Mai's woodcarving workshops and villages, is simply the best place to buy antique reproductions, home furnishing and decorative art made from wood. Many of the fantastic items sold in Bangkok, Phuket and Samui are produced right here and by going straight to the source you can get some truly fantastic deals. Even if you're not interested in giving your home décor a makeover, a trip to Ban Tawai just to watch the artisans and craftsmen at work is well worth it. **Location:** 20km south of the city centre



6. Sankampaeng Craft Street

While Ban Tawai is the destination for woodcarving and furniture, San Kamphaeng is the place to go for Thai silk, considered to be the best in the world. Rounding out the selection of products are lacquerware, ceramics (including fine Thai celadon) and the distinct, brightly coloured umbrellas that are a northern specialty. Shops and mini factories line both sides of the Chiang Mai-San Kamphaeng Road, where local artists practice their craft with a skill born of centuries-old tradition. **Location:** 13km east of the city centre



7. Wualai Silver Craf

Hand-crafted silver is one of Chiang Mai's rare ancient crafts, and Wualai Road is where to go for all types of silver crafts, whether framed as wall sculptures, silverware, utensils, or elaborate jewellery pieces. The craft's origins can be traced to Shan state in Burma hundreds of years ago, when families of silversmiths migrated south and settle down along the Wualai strip. Today, only a handful of them still practice silversmith, and you can watch them hammering away the metal at Wualai Road.



8. JJ Market Chiang Mai

Located slightly off the city centre, this vast open-air market is Chiang Mai's answer to modern shopping plazas and traditional craft centres. Shops are spread across the three zones, all housed inside a concrete structure. The atmosphere feels more relaxed than Night Bazaar and more modern than old-school crafts market. You will find similar range of creative crafts to those found along Nimmanhaemin Road, as well as traditional arts of Baan Tawai and San Kamphaeng. **Location:** Assadathon Rd (three blocks north of Old City)



TIPS AND GOOD TO KNOW

Song-taew Tips

The hop-on and hop-off red song-taews are the best way to get around Chiang Mai. However, as a newcomer to town, with a clueless look on your face, you will often be overcharged for the service. So, it's a good idea to ask your hotel's reception or a trusted person how much it should cost from point A to point B. Then, ask the driver before getting on how much, compare the price. If the quoted price is way too high, then just flag down another. For long-distant trips out of town, it's a good idea to negotiate for a half- or full-day price.

Carry small change

Thailand is relatively inexpensive, unless you plan to enjoy all your shopping, dining and nightlife inside a hotel or upscale shopping malls. Taxi drivers, food vendors and shop keepers usually don't carry change for big bills. So, make sure that you break the 1,000 baht notes into a few 100s and small coins upon arrival at the airport. The 5 and 10 baht coins usually come in handy when taking a taxi or public transportation.

Barter, but nicely

The first rule of shopping in Thailand: if there's no barcode or set price, get haggling. It's expected. However, instead of adopting a confrontational "give me it for this price, now!" attitude, try the gracious, smiley "what's your best price, my friend?" approach. Why? Because a smile here goes further than a sneer. Aim to chip anything from 10-40% off the quoted price. And by all means, walk away if the price is disagreeable – more often than not you'll be called back for last-ditch negotiations!

Beware scammers

It begins with a well-dressed stranger who approaches you with a story. A merchant from Bangkok and this being his last day in Chiang Mai before he heads for the capital city with all his merchandise. Offering you the last chance to buy bargain crafts at factory price, he is convincing enough that you think it might be a good idea to take a look at his collection. Then, before you know it, you're gripping the sides of a tuk-tuk as it whizzes to one overpriced outlet factory after another, and you know the rest of the story. Never fall for this type of story, or any, from a stranger – you have been warned.

Carry a photocopy of your passport

Whether it be an impromptu demand from a local policeman or a request from security at one of the city's swanky nightspots, carrying ID is a must in Thailand. The fact that you are 25 but look like you're pushing 40 doesn't matter – proving who you are is a day-to-day formality, something the Thais are finicky about. Instead of dragging your passport around with you, and with it the constant fear of losing it, take a photocopy.

Carry a hotel card with Thai directions

It's simple. It isn't rocket science. But this ingenious device, little more than a piece of card with your hotel's address written on it in Thai, will save endless how-do-we-get-home headaches. Flash it beneath the eyes of your chosen driver and watch how his shrugs of utter incomprehension instantly change to reassuring nods.

EASY THAI PHRASES

Krab / Ka = Words added at the end of a sentence/phrase to add politeness. Krab if you are a male. Ka if you are a female

Phom / Chan = I (male / female)

Khun = You (polite)

Sawad Dee (krab / ka) = Hello (male / female)

Khob Khun (krab / ka) = Thank you (male / female)

Phom / Chan Pood Thai mai pen = I (male / female) don't speak Thai

Hong nam yuu nai? = Where are the restrooms?

Tao rai (krab / ka)? = How much does it cost (male / female)?

Lod dai maak sood tao rai? = What's your best price?

Pood len rue plao = Are you kidding?

Nii khong jing rue khong plom = Is this real or fake?

Ao ped ped = I want my food very spicy

Mai ped = Not spicy

Check bin / Kheb tang = Can I have the bill please?

Khun lor / suay maak = You are very handsome / beautiful