

THE CAMBODIA / THAI TRAVEL COMPENDIUM

Soggy Paws – 2018

Purpose and Background

Before we go anywhere, we do a lot of online research, and it helps a lot to organize the data you're collecting into a manageable format. This is what this is. It isn't very comprehensive because I discovered Nomadic Matt's guide and decided I didn't need to do any more research.

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1.1 Siem Reap & Angkor Wat

1.1.1 Do's and don'ts for visiting the temples of Angkor.

1. Do hire a guide if you want to get in-depth historical and cultural information and have access to the best routes in which to explore each temple. The guides also know where all the good carvings/reliefs are and can show you those as well. The guide will also be in charge of arranging transportation, so do specify if you'd like to go by tuk-tuk, car or mini-van.
2. If you arrive in Siem Reap in the late afternoon, do go and purchase your pass at 5:00pm. They will let you into the compound and you can catch a sunset (the sunset shots are great at Angkor Wat westside). Your pass will be activated the next day.
3. Do specify what kind of Angkor Wat pass you want. The normal passes are good for 1 day (\$20), 2 or 3 days (\$40) and 1 week (\$60), however you can get the 3-day pass to be used within one week, and the 1-week pass to be used within one month. Don't forget to specify this at the time of purchase.
4. Do keep your pass handy, as you will be asked to show it when entering the temples. A plastic pass case on a leash comes in handy, and will protect the pass from getting soiled or damaged.
5. Do go at your own pace. It will prevent you from getting heat exhaustion. If you need to sit down and have a cold drink, just let your driver know. Try to go away from the crowds (you may be surprised to find something special), you can always follow them later.

1.1.2 Money and tipping

Do bring small bills (US\$1 and \$5) for shopping and tipping. US dollar becomes unofficial currency in Siem Reap and many vendors, even street vendors prefer US dollar. Vendors simply price their products in US dollar but most market vendors are not going to have change for a \$50 bill.

Don't change US dollar to the local currency, the riel at a bank and you will lose about 9 percent since bank exchange rate is at 1 USD= 3700 riels while vendors are pricing at 4000 riels. If you receive large bills from bank like 10000 or 50000 riels, it will even make more difficult for tipping. Riels in small face value is good to have and convenient for tipping, and for donations when visiting the temples.

Do tip for outstanding service. This includes guides and drivers (roughly \$2~\$3 per day, each), masseuses, and waitstaff at restaurants. For waitstaff, "rounding off the bill" by leaving some bills (riel) will be fine. Do know that tipping is not expected, but will be very much appreciated, and whether to tip or not and the amount to be given is entirely up to the discretion of the visitor.

Do seriously consider what you will be doing before you purchase items from children at the temple. If they are making money there, why should they bother to attend school? Additionally, the books they are selling are cheap copies and the authors do not get royalties from the sales. Sharing a smile or a chat with these children is a better option, and at least they will get to practice their English with a friendly visitor.

1.1.3 Clothing

Do wear lightweight garments. While many people opt for airy cotton fabrics, others prefer synthetics such as the kind that are available at mountaineering stores. The climate is very humid most of the time, and the synthetic fibers wick away sweat and dry on your body.

Don't wear revealing clothing- short shorts or midriff-baring tops, low cut blouses, etc (especially for women). Longer shorts, like right above the knee or capri pants are perfectly acceptable. Do note that if

you wish to climb up to the towers atop Angkor Wat that both men and women should be "respectfully dressed", i.e. covered shoulders and chest, and long pants or skirts (long shorts are acceptable).

Do bring a hat or cap, and sunglasses.

Do wear sensible shoes. While technically the temples can be done in a pair of flip-flops, it would be a wiser choice to wear a pair of hiking sandals such as Teva or Keens. (Toe coverage is also a good idea.)

While sneakers and socks or hiking boots may be overkill taking into consideration the heat and humidity of Cambodia, the bottom line is to wear what you feel comfortable in.

Don't forget a light jacket (such as microfleece) for early mornings, especially if you are going out by tuk-tuk or motodup. It tends to get very chilly in the wee hours with the wind blowing on you, especially in the cooler months.

1.1.4 Safety and health

Do take out an insurance policy that will cover medical treatment or accidents before you leave, or check with your insurance company at home to see whether you'll be covered when abroad.

Do use sunscreen. You can bring your favorite brand from home, or purchase it when there.

Do use insect repellent. While the risk of contracting malaria is very low in the immediate Siem Reap area, if you will be venturing out to the countryside (Phnom Kulen, Koh Ker, etc) then you will need to use a good DEET-based insect repellent. Repellent with a concentration of 25% is sufficient, and should be applied every 6 hours, or more frequently when you sweat. Remember, the sunscreen goes on first, the bug spray last.

Don't forget to drink plenty of water. If you are not used to the humidity (or dry weather), you may easily get dehydrated. You can check with your driver beforehand to see if he supplies water (many do, and even have a little cooler). If not, bring one bottle with you and you can buy more en route.

1.1.5 Required Reading

Do read "Temple of a Thousand Faces" by John Shors, which is a wonderful novel about Angkor Wat. Many fantastic guidebooks on the area are also available.

1.1.6 Suggested 3 Day Itinerary

(this from a tour package on the Cambodian Tourism site)

Day 1: Arrival and visit Rolous Group and Small Circuit

Arrive in the morning – meet with guide for transfer to hotel. The same morning tour to Rolous Group including Preah Ko, Bakong, Lo Lei. Afternoon tour to Small Circuit including Prasat Kravan (Cardamon sanctuary), Banteay Kdei, Srah Srang (Royal Bath), Ta Prohm (Jungle Temple), Takeo, Thommanon and Chau Say Tevoda. Overnight Siem Reap.

Day 2: South Gate of Angkor Thom and Angkor Wat

Morning, tour to South Gate of Angkor Thom, Bayon, Baphoun, Terrace of the Elephants and Terrace of the Leper King. Afternoon visit the World Seventh Wonder of Angkor Wat and view sunset at Phnom Bakheng Hill. Overnight Siem Reap. {B}

Day 3: Grand Circuit and floating village

Morning visit Grand Circuit including Pre Rup (Change the body), East Mebon, Ta Som, Neak Pean, Preah Khan and Baksei Chamkrong. Afternoon boat trip on Tonle Sap Great Lake, visit floating village and view sunset at Phnom Krom. Overnight Siem Reap. {B}

Day 4: Departure (No Guide)

Morning free at leisure until transfer for departure flight. {B}

1.2 Bangkok

1.2.1 Carina Notes

<https://sv-carina.org/OurPicturesPages/OurPicturesThailandBangkok1.htm>

1.2.2 Ocelot Notes

Cities aren't really our thing, but this was Bangkok! We spent 2 days exploring Bangkok and barely scratched the surface. We:

- toured the old palace grounds with all the gorgeous museums,
- visited countless huge gold-plated temples and statues of Buddha,
- went sight-seeing along the Chao Praya River by water ferry,
- wandered the back-streets looking for fun restaurants,
- swore at taxi drivers who refused to take us where we wanted to go,
- rediscovered the joys of ice-cream on a hot day in a big city, and
- explored many modern (air conditioned!) malls.

Two days of glitz was enough for us country bumpkins so we headed up-country to Chiang Mai.

In Bangkok the Royal Palace with its landscaped greenery topped by graceful golden roofs, and intriguing museums of a royal past jolted me into the reality of the city I had never seen on my short visits many years ago.

I loved walking the streets at night along Petchburi and Pratunam districts to step around the shoe sellers and medallion sellers, the cloth vendors and watch hawkers who covered the sidewalks in front of starkly modern office buildings and malls not yet shut down for the night. Two meals in Bangkok stand out above all others: one at Mama's, a small open-air cafe on the corner of Soi 20 or 21 and Petchburi Street, just a few blocks from our hotel (the Pratunam Palace -- a grandiose name for an adequate, but concrete, barely air-conditioned hotel). It was our first Bangkok meal, and having ignored the suggestion to patronize some over-the-top touristy place, we felt at home in Mama's where the owner's wife or daughter spoke a bit of English, the menu had an English version of dishes we knew from Phuket, and best of all, the prices ranged from 60—90 Baht (\$2—3) per dinner. We kept the Pepto-Bismol close at hand that evening, but suffered not one tummy twinge.

The other meal, more sumptuous and a bit pricier (120—180 Baht or \$4—6) was Indian, deep in the back streets of Bangkok near the Royal Palace. Stepping around dogs, women washing dishes in large aluminum tubs in the alley, and the children playing, we entered the Indian restaurant into a small, air-conditioned dining room with elegant table settings, lovely paintings on the walls, and friendly staff who were attentive but not over-bearing even though we were the only dinner patrons. It was one of the best Indian meals I've eaten, with spicy but delicately flavored meats and chickens, garlic rotis done to perfection, and an assortment of condiments. That it came from an open-air kitchen along the alley added to its piquancy.

1.3 Getting from Bangkok to to Chang Mai

Ocelot 2007: There are several ways to get from Bangkok to Chiang Mai but we chose the day train (for reasons that escape me now). This was indeed an ethnic experience (the \$18 tickets included lunch and 2 snacks) and the views were fun (we saw elephants by the river!) but the tracks and shock-absorbers

were in such poor condition that at times we felt we were in a washing machine. We were bounced around so much that I'm somewhat surprised the train didn't leap off its tracks.

We later learned that busses were cheaper, faster, quieter, gave a smoother ride, ran more often, were air-conditioned, and were probably the preferred transportation medium (besides flying). Those who take a night train get a night's sleep (although I wonder how good it would be) but miss all the passing scenery. Once by day was enough, though!

1.4 Chang Mai

1.4.1 When to Go

(Trip Advisor – Broder): The most popular time to travel is during the high season of November through February, as the weather is not as hot as during other times and there is little rain. However, my favorite time to travel is mid September through mid November, as there are fewer other travelers and hotels are less expensive through late October. Many people avoid traveling to the area in April through August, due to rain (in April due to the burn off and not rain), but I have traveled to Chiang Rai during all those months and have enjoyed every trip.

1.4.2 Wat Suan Dok

Admire its 48- metre-high Sri Lankan-style chedi ,which overlooks the Royal Cemetery.

1.4.3 Wat Phra Sing

in the old town and appreciate the beauty of this large complex of more than 60 buildings

1.4.4 Wat Chedi Luang

14th century Wat Chedi Luang in the very heart of the old city.This ancient temple has a more rustic appearance and has been restored after decades of decay

1.4.5 Wat Chet Yot and Wat Chiang Man

Due to its age,the Chet Yot temple betrays some signs of ruin while the Chiang Man temple is renowned for its numerous elephant sculptures

1.4.6 Wat Phra That Doi Suthep

Enjoy magnificent panoramic views of the city. The temple is reached by climbing a 309-step naga staircase or via cable car. If the views are stunning, the temple itself is even better and boasts a number of dazzling structures

1.4.7 Wararot Market

a historical landmark renowned for the variety and quality of its produce

1.4.8 Thai Elephant Care Center

The care center was set up to provide care for elderly elephants retired from logging and camps. Appreciate these gentle giants,learn more about their nature and their charm.

1.4.9 Longtail boat on the River Kok towards Chiang Rai

passing the highland villages of the Muser people and the Karen tribes. The beauty of the hills that surround the river enhances the spectacular natural scenery.

1.4.10 Philip & Leslie Notes

You don't want to be out near the University anyway. Big city traffic. The U is a very modern city zone; nice but not really what you go to Chiang Mai for.

The old moated city is where the real Chiang Mai is. Small streets to wander and find treasures, like obscure magnificent temples, public markets and funky restaurants. Be sure to plan to be there during the weekend market when they close off the Rachadamneon Rd. And the cross street in the moated city. Fantastic people watching.

Amazing prices on cashmere, silk and just about everything else you can think of. So, stay in old town.

Just east of the moat is another shopping area where you'll see bugs and worms (for sale as food) and buddhas and just about everything else.

Our guest house was fantastic. Queen sized bed, nice bathroom, clean towels, hot water, air con, fridge, TV (we didn't use), bottled water, desk. Wifi. Non smoking. Small but great. Nice people. Half the price of the guesthouse next door. We stayed almost two weeks and when we got the final bill it was cheaper than they quoted us. (About \$14.50 per day.)

Walking distance to everything in old town, though renting a bicycle is also a great idea. (About \$1.50 per day). Traffic is chaotic but the drivers seem able to avoid collisions with you in old town.

Riding in other areas is a bit more dicey. The local market (where they take the cooking school guests in the morning) was one block over. We would go and buy fruit and juice and store it in our fridge.

One block to the north was a great bagel place that served gorgeous espresso and lattes too. Also in old town was the cooking school we went to: Zabb E Lee. Great fun. Great food. Ask for Art.

So, our guest house: Baan Ramada, 20/1 Sol 7, MoonMuang Rd. Sripoom, Chiang Mai

Sol is a side street off the "main" street of MoonMuang. So it's the seventh side street. MoonMuang Rd. is the road that runs along the eastern edge of old town, along the moat.

Sol 1 SriPoom Rd., about 100 yards from Baan Ramada is VK Bikes. He speaks good English and is a super guy. Rides his own bike to the big mountain temple about 15 km each morning at 4am. He knows his bikes. Sister lives in the USA. Nice man. Good bikes.

Along MoonMuang you'll find motorbike rental companies. A Honda 125 is about \$25 per day. Check out the quality of the HELMETS before you rent the bike.

The great monk chat is at the Phra Singh Temple. Got to the NW corner and there's a school there. Look for Charoen Pomsiri's monk chat sign. Say hello to Charoen for us please. A great experience. We went three times. Nice kids. (Maybe contact him on Facebook too.)

Train to Chiang Mai: We tried to take the train to Chiang Mai and then were delayed in Bangkok with the medical stuff at Bumrungrad. Couldn't get another ticket for weeks out and never a first class ticket. Ended up flying.

Got a deal for \$50 one way (Tiger Air, a division of Thai Air which had an office in Chiang Mai) which was close in price to the train. We would recommend flying over train as that will give you more time in Chiang Mai. We did use an internet agent for the original train tickets and had to go down near the Golden Buddha in Bangkok to collect tickets.

They delivered as promised. Thai Railways gave us a refund for the tickets when we couldn't change the date to a reasonable one. We lost the agent fee but that was peanuts.

1.5 Chang Rai

1.5.1 Weather

There are three seasons: the hot season from March to May, the rainy season from May to October and the cool season from November to February. In the cool season, the temperature can drop to 13 C at night.

1.5.2 Hiring a Car with Driver

(Trip Advisor – Broder 2013): People usually do their tours in one of three ways (though other means are possible).

1. They hire a van/car with a driver only – no guide.
2. They hire a van/car with a guide who does the driving – no separate driver.
3. They hire a van/car with a guide and a driver.

I have done all three.

The third option can be really nice if you have a group of 5 or 6 people and you want the guide to be able to turn around in the van and talk to you, answer questions, explain the area you are driving through. It is also handy when you are being dropped off at places like the White Temple, the Burma border at Mae Sai or Doi Tung, and the driver goes to park and stay with the car while the guide goes with you.

If you hire a guide and also have a driver, as in option 3, the additional cost is 300 baht per day, as the driver is paid 300 baht per day. So a full day tour from Chiang Rai to Doi Tung is 2800 baht if you have a guide and a driver.

If you use option number 2 above, where the guide is the driver, your cost is 300 baht less than option 3. So a full day tour from Chiang Rai to Doi Tung is 2500 baht if your guide also acts as the driver.

If you option number 1 above, the cost would be about 2300 baht, as your cost would include paying 300 baht for the driver but not the 800 baht for a guide.

The base price for the van and fuel would be 2,000 baht in the above scenarios.

1.5.3 Daytrip-Mae Kok Longtail, Ruammit, Raft Ride, Waterfall

1. Taking a one hour long tail boat ride along the Mae Kok river to Ruammit, watching the locals go about their daily activities along the riverside. (1 ½ hr)
2. Elephant riding in Ruammit through the jungle and the river (no elephant tricks, no shows). (1-2 hrs) plus Ruammit village (1hr) The Ruammit elephant camp is more of a co-op of the "short neck" Karen tribe. There are no elephant shows or tricks. The village maintains the elephants and uses them to give tourists rides through the jungle and river. It is a more rural type of experience, but it is not a sanctuary.
3. Going just west of the village of Ruammit (about half way to Tha Ton) and taking a leisurely raft ride down the Mae Kok River, with lunch cooked on the raft, then getting off the raft to visit local Hill Tribes and the suspension bridge and going to the Phasert hot springs . (4 hrs) The starting place for the raft trip is about 40 minutes to the west of Chiang Rai
4. Going to the waterfall outside of Ruammit and swimming in the pool below it. (1 hr) When it is open, stopping at the "Jungle Restaurant" in the middle of nowhere for lunch or a snack (in lieu of #3)

1.5.4 Wat Rong Khun / White Temple (TA #1)

(Trip Advisor) On your first day in Chiang Rai, I'd just go out to the White Temple, then wander around town, stop in for dinner somewhere, have a foot massage and then head out to the night market.

You can do the White Temple and Black Temple on your own by Tuk Tuk in a half day. However, you might find yourself a bit pressed for time to see both in a half day, as they are not close to one another. But, if you only are going to spend an hour at each, you'll be fine.

there's plenty of food markets next to it so you can get your local grub before heading back down to Chiang Mai.

We have rented a bike in town and went to that location. Have to say I have visited a lot of temples but that was... Magnificent!

Careful gents and ladies, Men and ladies should wear pants. If you do not have any you can rent some in the nearest shop.

This isn't just another temple like Chiang-Mai, this is a 21st century vision of Hell and Redemption. Quirky , artistic, funny at times we thoroughly enjoyed all the different iconography.

Need to adhere to temple dress code. Admission is 50 baht. Worth every cent.

1.5.5 Doi Mae Salong (TA #5)

This is about an hour and a half drive from Chiang Rai.

(Trip Advisor – Broder 2013): A trip from Chiang Rai to Mae Salong is about 2,900 baht if you have a separate guide and driver; 2,600 baht if your guide is also the driver. If you are staying overnight in Mae Salong and then using the guide/driver/van or car for two full days then the cost will likely double. Also, if you stay at a hotel that doesn't comp a room for the guide and driver, it may cost another 200 baht for a room for the guide in Mae Salong.

A guide is about 800 baht a day. But you then need to add the cost of a van or car and the cost of fuel onto that. If you are staying right in Chiang Rai or within 20 km of the city, the charge will be closer to 2200 baht per day total as your fuel cost will be lower. If you are driving within about 100 km of the city, it will be closer to the 2800 or 2900 mark as your fuel cost will be higher.

The cost for this type of trip should be 2600 - 2900 per car/van and not per person. There are some tour guides who increase the cost by a per person rate, but the better ones generally do not. The raft trip, which it doesn't sound like you are doing, is a per person rate, but the rate per person decreases with the number of people.

Mae Salong, the White Temple and the Black Artist House is more than enough for one day. I wouldn't suggest adding in anything else.

Going on your own: Taking a car, or bus (20BHT) from the Old Bus Station, rather than a tuk-tuk, is recommended, in order to visit The White Temple (Wat Rong Khun) and gallery complex some 20 minutes south of the city.

You could spend at least an hour or two here, or more. The artist is Chalermchai Kositpipat. This is a modern temple and a work of art in itself. Even the golden amenities block is amazing. There is a sophisticated and rather slick gift shop: grab some postcards. Don't forget the artist's own gallery/museum across the road.

Now, what next? You have to make a decision. You can go to a wonderful waterfall, or you can go back to town. Lunch is due reasonably soon, and food can be found virtually anywhere.

The White Temple is situated at the entrance to **Khun Kon Waterfall Forest Park**, 12 km away. Khun Korn waterfall @ Mae Korn, about 30 km south of CR, is the highest waterfall in the district, with a 70 metre fall of cool, clear, clean water which runs all year round. You need to be fit: it's 1,400 metres above the carpark. The hike takes about 45 minutes along a forest-fringed path that cuts through several cascade pools and over bamboo bridges. Swimming is allowed. There is plenty to see and do in the park.

1.5.6 Opium Museums

(Trip Advisor): The Hall of Opium is a very large, state of the art, interactive museum that is located just outside Sob Ruak (about a 1/2 mile), which is at the **Golden Triangle** area. It is amazing and definitely worth a visit if you have the time. I spent about 2 hours there but wish I had spent 3 hours. The Opium museum is a small local museum right in the heart of the town of Sob Ruak and takes about 20 minutes to walk through. Both are worthwhile.

1.5.7 Hill Tribes

(Trip Advisor – Broder) You can certainly see hilltribes in the Chiang Rai area, but you will need to travel about 30 minutes outside town. If you want to visit a hilltribe that is not set up for tourists, you'll most likely need a guide to both get you to the hilltribe and assist you with communication. There are several guides in the FAQ in the upper right hand side of this page who grew up in local hilltribes. If you want suggestions, let us know. Hilltribes in the Chiang Rai area (within about 90 minutes) include Yao, Karen, Akha, Lahu, Hmong (Meo) and Lisu. If your goal was to visit all of these hilltribes on your trip, you would be able to do so.

I have not seen many vintage curios in the markets in Chiang Rai. I think you might find more in Chiang Mai or Bangkok.

1.5.8 Raummit Elephant Camp

The Raummit elephant camp is more of a co-op of the "short neck" Karen tribe. There are no elephant shows or tricks. The village maintains the elephants and uses them to give tourists rides through the jungle and river. It is a more rural type of experience, but it is not a sanctuary.

1.5.9 Golden Triangle Day Trip

visit Wat Rong Khun, a dazzling temple built in the 1990s. Its ornate all-white exterior, with embedded pieces of mirror, gives it a resplendent appearance, which makes it one of the most beautiful temples in Thailand. Continue to Chiang Sean for a panoramic view of the Golden Triangle where Laos, Myanmar and Thailand meet and the mighty River Mekong. Enjoy lunch at the Imperial Golden Triangle Resort