

GUIDED TOURS TO THE TREASURES OF THAILAND



A dreamlike sprawl of tranquil temples and glistening streams. A modern metropolis of maze-like streets and markets. With so much diverse terrain and ancient mystery to explore in Thailand, guided tours are a perfect way to experience it all without getting overwhelmed.

Ours began in bustling Bangkok, a city vibrant with sights, sounds and colour. The modern and the ancient stand side by side, and it was a blessing to be with a knowledgeable guide. The Grand Palace complex is like something straight out of ancient myth. It is home to the famed emerald Buddha, carved from a single piece of jade. The buildings here are like fairytale palaces with turrets, spires and more colour than you would find in an old world sweet shop.

At the night market dusky streets come alive with smells of spices and flowers. Gold and red glint from souvenir stalls along with rolled silk and saris. Anything and everything is sold here, including plenty of things you've never even heard of before.

The Kanchanaburi province is reached over classic Thai countryside, with rice paddies and sugar plantations spreading out over the land. Beside the famed steel bridge a number of 'ghost train' steam engines can be viewed at a small station. The Death Railway is an enlightening trip, so called due to the 100,000 or more who died during its construction, many of whom were prisoners of war. We experienced a real sense of rural Thai life on this journey, history echoing out from the rail tracks. The JEATH War Museum is a moving tribute to the period, with replicas of the bamboo huts which housed prisoners and photographs of life in the camps.

Sukhothai Historical Park is a UNESCO world heritage site, and was Thailand's first capital, an ancient kingdom which arose in the early thirteenth century. 45 square km of Thailand's most impressive ruins stand here, with incredible examples of ancient geometry and architectural prowess. Our journey continued to one of the oldest towns in Thailand, Chiang Saen on the banks of the Mekong River. Temples and monuments are abundant, giving a lucid impression of an old world Thailand and its traditions.

We then travelled to the north, where a bridge separates the town of Mae Sai from Burma. Traders come across the river to sell beautiful items including gems and jade. The Golden Triangle tour began here, where hill tribe villages nestle amidst lofty mountains, the inhabitants retaining their own languages, religions and culture.

The temples of nearby Chiang Mai are story-book sanctuaries, wood carvings and lattice work decorating the many Wats. In the morning, craftspeople can be seen at work making ornate umbrellas, silver and silk. Elephants perform feats of strength and skill in the midst of teak forests to the north. And finally, at the end of the day as sunlight plays off the wisps of mist settling in the valley, a visit to Doi Suthep crowns the tour: a mountain temple with astounding views over Chiang Mai.

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