

# *Real Thailand*

## *Cultural Tour of Thailand*



A rare opportunity for the more adventurous travellers to would like to discover the culture and meet the real people of Thailand. You will explore the country for a fortnight, taking in four different areas and meeting local people who will welcome you into their lives. This off-the-beaten-track itinerary is designed for couples who want to get away from it all, but are prepared to get immersed in different cultures during their very own 'soft adventure' holiday. You will also have a bit of time to yourself and at the end of your journey, relax at a beautiful boutique beach resort.



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### ***Day 1 – Saturday***

Fly from London Heathrow with Thai Airways or Eva Air *Regional departures are available*. This direct flight departs from Heathrow around midday and takes just under twelve hours, arriving in Bangkok at around 6am the next morning, local time. *We have chosen this particular flight as it is the best one to make the most of our recommended itinerary, however, it is also possible for you to take a flight departing Heathrow around 9pm in the evening, arriving in Bangkok at approximately 3pm the next day.*

### ***Day 2 - Sunday***

Welcome to Thailand! One of our drivers, Tommy, will meet you at the airport, just look out for a sign with the Tell Tale Travel 'pink peacock'. Tommy will whisk you away to a residential suburb, close to the Chao Praya river that runs through the sprawling city.



Here, you will arrive at your base for the next few days, a charming wooden house that you will have to yourselves. This cosy house is located in the garden of the home of a professional English-speaking couple, Wan and Goi, who live in the main house with their teenage children and Goi's mother. As well as your air-conditioned bedroom, your house has its own small living area, two bathrooms and a kitchen (although there is no need for you to use it to cook independently).

After you have had most of the day to yourselves to relax and settle in, Wan and Goi will take you for a walk in their local area, which is known for the wooden furniture made by local craftsmen.

Then, it's time for you're a home-cooked feast - you will watch dinner being made and have dinner with the family, which will be a great introduction into Thai culture as well as food.



### ***Day 3 – Monday***



This morning, you can have a lie-in and have breakfast at your leisure. In the afternoon, you'll have a chance to do some sightseeing. Accompanied by our guide, Tong, you will visit the main sites of the Grand Palace, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, Wat Pho the oldest temple in Bangkok and Wat Arun (Temple of Dawn). Whilst a bit touristy by Tell Tale Travel standards, will let you 'tick off' the main sights in Thailand, though you will still get a flavour of local life by taking in a local market.

After sightseeing, you will meet your driver. You can spend the evening exploring Bangkok (he will take you and wait for you). Do have a look at our tips to choose where to eat, from charming restaurants set in peaceful gardens to the hustle and bustle of Chinatown, or visit the lively Suan Lum night bazaar.



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### Day 4 – Tuesday

This morning, you'll be picked up by a guide and taken to the nearby island of Ko Kret where you will explore this historic part of the city by bicycle. This car-free island, set in the Chao Praya river, is home to descendants of the Mon people who originally came to the island in the 1700s. Please note that this is a join-on day with a small number of other people.

Life on Ko Kret is far more relaxed than the rest of busy Bangkok - people sit in the shade beside their houses, completing household chores and chatting to pass the time. You will cycle through local villages and past palm trees swaying in the wind and rice paddy fields. The people of Ko Kret are renowned for their fine craftsmanship skills in pottery, covered in intricate carvings, and you'll end your day at a village to watch this time-honored tradition in motion.



You'll then be taken back and will have some time to relax in the garden before a home-cooked dinner with Goi and her family.

### Day 5 – Wednesday

Time to say goodbye to Bangkok and your new friends. You are heading to the Central Plains, the agricultural heartland of the country, often referred to as the 'rice bowl of Thailand'. Rice is the staple food here, but you will also enjoy fresh vegetables like bok choy, snow peas and straw mushrooms, along with chicken, beef or pork or fish from the waters of the Chao Praya river which heads north through this area.

You will be picked up this morning by Tong and your driver and on your way, you will visit Bangkok's vast farmers' market, Aw Taw Kaw. Have a look around the freshest crops from around Thailand, you can also snack on food like *Mieng Kam*, a betel-leaf wrapped sweet and sour explosion served as an appetizer in posh restaurants but on the streets as a snack.



After 1-1.5 hours, you will arrive in historic Ayutthaya, one of Thailand's ancient capitals and a UNESCO rated site where you will have a guided visit of some of the temples. ***Tell Tale Tip*** Although we do not usually encourage elephant rides, if you see the elephants in the historical area decked in traditional royal yellow and red and it appeals to you, feel free to take a short ride. These elephants work short hours to support older elephants at a sanctuary nearby.

Then it's a short drive to a sleepy, canal-side village in the Central Plains where the way of life has been relatively unspoilt by modern ways. When you get to the village, you will meet some stalwarts of this community, the village headman, Prachim, his wife Pao and their children who will welcome you into their beautiful house which overlooks the canal and has views over the family's paddyfields at the back. As the sun sets, you'll be taken around the local area by a traditional wooden boat.



As you drift down the canal, you will see everyone from fishermen to housewives ending their work for the day. You will also stop at a local temple - you may see people feeding the fish in the water by the temple, Buddhists believe in a merit system and this is a popular way of earning it.



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*As you will be spending a couple of nights in this village where English is not really spoken, our guide Tong you met the day before will be accompanying you for this part of your holiday. Don't worry, you will still have one-on-one experiences with local people and time on your own, but Tong will be on hand to translate when required!*

*Please note whilst this village would be considered fairly prosperous by local standards, people follow the traditional communal form of living. Although you will have the top floor of the house to yourselves and it is light and airy with beautiful teak panelling, you will have to sleep on Thai-style mattresses and share a bathroom for the family..*

After a traditional rural dinner, you will have a quick culinary lesson – the village headman's wife, Pao, will show you how to make traditional Thai desserts. These are extremely sweet and the perfect end to a spicy meal.

### **Day 6 – Thursday**

An early start this morning, you will watch the locals giving alms to the monks (depending on the day, the monks may come to the house or you may go to the temple) and you are welcome to participate if you want to.

Then, Pao will take you to the local market so she can pick up some fresh ingredients for the day's meals. The market is just a short distance away by local taxi but if you want the best of the seasonal produce, you have to get there early and jostle with everyone else! When you get back to the village, you will spend the rest of the morning learning how to make a few traditional central Thai dishes and Pao will show you some insider tricks and secret family recipes.



After feasting on your efforts, you'll have a couple of hours to relax on your own, a great chance to sit with a book on the terrace overlooking the canal, enjoying the breeze. In the late afternoon, you can have a bicycle ride around the village and surrounding fields.

### **Day 7 – Friday**

Time to pack up and say goodbye to the headman's family, the village and your guide Tong.

Our driver will pick you up and take you to Bangkok airport where to catch a flight to the northern part of Isan, the vast region that covers the north-eastern part of the country - its southern-most point is east of Bangkok and in the north, it borders Laos, with Cambodia lying to the east. On the eastern side lies Cambodia, and along with architectural influences from here, you will see influences from both Laos and Cambodia in many areas of the Isan's culture and food.

After your short flight, you will be picked up at the nearest airport, Khon Kaen, and taken on a 2-3 hour drive through the countryside to a small village, surrounded by hilly forest. Here, you will be the guest of Noi who moved back to her home village, with her Australian-born husband, David.



You will have time this afternoon to settle into your charming chalet, which is decorated in antique style although with modern touches such as a sunken bath. Sit on your private verandah with a book, or relax by the lovely pool or stroll around the gardens, abundant with herbs including Thai basil and lemongrass. David and Noi have made an idyllic retreat, with tranquil gardens in which their delightful menagerie of animals from pheasants to peacocks wander freely.



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Later on, Noi and David will take you for a walk around the local village and give you a glimpse into the lives of the local people. Then, it's time for a sundowner on the verandah before an introductory dinner into Isan food, very different from the cream curries of other parts of Thailand and famous for its abundant use of chillies and use of *Khao Niao*, 'sticky rice'.

### ***Day 8 – Saturday***

Today, you will spend most of the day sightseeing and discovering northern Isan on a day out with David. You'll visit Wat Pa Nam Yoi, a vast temple, home to the highest pagoda in Thailand. Situated on a hill, as well as the many intriguing features with the temple, it is worth visiting for the spectacular views of the surrounding countryside. After lunch at a local restaurant to enjoy some local specialities, you'll stop at some villages to see traditional handicrafts such as cotton-weaving.

This evening, a driver will pick you up for an evening out on your own. Mukdahan, which is located on the banks of the Mekong River, has charming restaurants, as well as a lively food market, a great place to taste regional delicacies. The town is famous for its bustling night market, particularly lively with locals at the weekend, which sells everything from Chinese electronics to handwoven silk made locally. ***Tell Tale Tip*** *We recommend buying packets of coffee from Laos as delicious but lightweight gifts to take home.*



### ***Day 9 – Sunday***

Discover a traditional aspect of Isan life, you are going foraging this morning! Led by Noi's pet monkey Darwin, you will explore the surrounding forest. The local people look for all sorts of things, including insects which they think look particularly fresh and crispy, but you can stick to fresh herbs.



Before you set off, you will take part in another part of the culture, although this time you will get to sit back and enjoy the show – the village children will show you their traditional Phu Thai dances, accompanied by tribal drums. The villagers say having people from other countries take interest in their culture encourages the children to take pride in and maintain traditional ways. This may help stem the flow of young people going to the big city where they have a poorer quality of life and are away from their families.

When you return from foraging in the forest and your picnic lunch, you will have the afternoon to enjoy the pool and the gardens before drinks on the deck and a delicious home-cooked dinner.

### ***Day 10 – Monday***

This morning, it's time to leave the north-east and head off for the final part of your holiday, by the Andaman Sea. Your journey today will cover a significant part of the length of the country as you take a plane from Khon Kaen to Bangkok and another plane from Bangkok to Krabi in the south of the country.



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You will be met at Krabi airport by one of our drivers who will quickly whisk you away from the tourists going on coaches to their resorts. As you drive along Krabi's winding roads, you will soon see the famous rock formations of the Andaman Coast, which rise like cliffs by the roadside and are covered with tropical jungle plants. This breathtaking landscape has served as backdrops in Hollywood films ranging from Star Wars to James Bond's *The Man with the Golden Gun*.

First, you will take a short boat ride to an island called Ko Klang literally off the coast of Krabi, but unlike the islands which are full of hotels and resorts, it is home to people who mainly live traditional lives from fishing and farming. This tiny island is free from cars but abundant with the bright colours of emerald-green paddyfields, fruit such as the yellow jackfruit and tropical flora such as hibiscus and birds of paradise, all of which provide a contrast to the surrounding azure sea.



When you get to Ko Klang, you will meet our friend Supanee who lives here with her husband Suchart and their young children. Settle into your simple but charming chalet in Su's garden, before you have a delicious feast of the island's specialities. These are often made with the fresh fish and squid straight off the boats, or bounty from Ko Klang itself, from the mussels on the beach to the berries in the trees.

### *Day 11 - Tuesday*



Today, you will have a boat trip around the small uninhabited islands which dot the Andaman coastline. Drifting along on a long-tail boat is a great way to experience the stunning scenery and is extremely relaxing, although you will stop to snorkel in coral reefs teeming with tropical fish. Today, you'll explore the Hong Islands, considered to be some of the most beautiful in the area, containing pristine white beaches and a hidden emerald lagoon and perfect white beaches.

### *Day 12- Wednesday*

This morning Su will take you to across the water to Krabi to visit its food market. You can have breakfast at the market - locals love eating *roti* a type of flat bread, with a creamy but spicy curry, an influence of nearby Malay cuisine (although originating in eastern India). Su will take you for a walk around the market to check out the day's stock and catch up on local gossip.



This afternoon, you can have to yourselves on the island, relax in the garden with a book or go for a walk, a great way to find out more about life here. If you're feeling energetic at sunset, you can join in the villagers' daily games of volleyball. Then, it's time to get watch Su cook up a storm! One of her specialities is *Pad Paet Goong* - first you pound together a fiery curry paste, then add it to a stir fry with prawns and green beans tossed with garlic, oyster and soya sauce, truly memorable.



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### *Days 13 and 14 – Thursday and Friday*

Now, it's time for some pure relaxation. On Thursday morning, you will be taken to the mainland and driven to the chic and stylish Tubkaak Resort. The resort is located in a quiet area of Krabi, has views of the spectacular islands of Ko Hong. You can spend the afternoon enjoying the white sandy beach, the large pool and your spacious room.



Each room is slightly different, depending on the orientation of the building on the hillside.

### *Day 15 - Saturday*

This morning, you will be driven to Krabi airport where you will take a short internal flight to Bangkok to connect to your international flight home. You will get back to London Heathrow at approximately 7pm UK time (same day).

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*This specially designed 15-day itinerary costs from £1,900 per person based on two adults sharing (price valid most of the year). This includes direct flights with Thai Airways or Eva Air, accommodation, excursions/activities, transport and meals except as listed below. Please allow £25 per person for local expenses such as national park fees plus whatever you wish to spend on other items not included (see below). We recommend overall spending money of £300-400 per couple.*

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### **EXCLUDED:**

Lunch: Days 3, 5, 7, 10, 13-15

Dinner: Days 3, 8, 13-14

Personal travel insurance

Expenses of a personal nature such as laundry, internet access and alcoholic drinks

Expenses during free time

Tips for guides and drivers (discretionary)

*Please note that your itinerary may change before you leave or on the ground (improvements or unforeseeable circumstances), we will endeavour to keep you informed.*



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### ***Background Information***

Tell Tale Travel is a specialist tour operator. Each trip is tailor-made yet affordable, while respectful of local people and places. We are small enough to give you true personal service yet experienced and knowledgeable enough to make sure you have the organisation and back-up you need. When you are on your holiday, you will have a detailed itinerary and plenty of tips and recommendations. As well as support from our unique network of local people, you can also contact either our London office or Thai office at any time.

Tell Tale Travel is a London-based company, subject to English law. We are licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority so your holiday will be protected by ATOL. We are also licensed by the Travel Trust Association which gives you 100% protection on all elements of your holiday.

### ***What makes Tell Tale Travel holidays so special?***

#### ***Hand-selected***

Every element of a Tell Tale journey has been hand-selected by us, not by other people. We painstakingly hunt out the best authentic experiences. If we don't think it's the finest Thailand has to offer or we wouldn't want to do it, we won't tell you about it.

#### ***Local Insight***

You'll meet local people that we have chosen to show you the real Thailand. Furthermore, you'll experience the overwhelming warmth of genuine hospitality throughout your holiday.

#### ***Just For You***

You don't have to share your experience with a tour group or a tour leader. And as it's just for you – just tell us what you want to do and we'll make sure you do it.

#### ***Responsible Tourism***

You will be able to see first-hand how your money benefits local people and communities. A supplementary income enables a better quality of life in small villages and a chance to share their culture, history and lifestyle with the outside world.

#### ***Hassle Free Organisation***

We will organise everything we can. This means you can get the best Thailand has to offer, such as a particular scenic train journey without the inconvenience of organising it. Where we are not able to organise something in advance for you, we will give you guidance or a local contact.

#### ***Guidance***

Guidebooks by their nature are out of date from the day they're published. We give you insider up-to-the-minute information on the best things to do. We also give you general advice that will help you throughout your journey to the extent of cultural and clothing tips depending on what you are doing on a particular day.

#### ***Fair Prices***

We only sell our own holidays, this means we can make sure everyone involved, you and our network of local people, get a fair price. And unlike other operators, we don't have surcharges - if after you've booked, there's a rise in fuel surcharges or a change in exchange rates which makes our costs higher, you still pay the same.

