

EXPLORE!



Old Siam and the River Kwai

11 days

Thailand - Trip code OS

Old Siam and the River Kwai

On this cultural journey we venture into the heart of Thailand. We tour ancient sights and cruise along bustling waterways. We see the infamous 'Bridge over the River Kwai' and explore ruined temples at the former royal capital of Ayutthaya. We also cruise the Chao Phraya River in a converted rice barge, travel deep into the jungle, visit a Mon village and stay on a jungle raft house on the Kwai Noi River.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Bangkok** - Explore the glittering Grand Palace complex and Wat Po, the temple of the Reclining Buddha
- ★ **Chiang Mai** - Bustling walled old town and the serene hillside Doi Suthep Temple
- ★ **Sukhothai** - Cycle around the historic park housing the remains of this ancient capital
- ★ **Ayutthaya** - Site of ancient monuments from a once grand Siamese capital
- ★ **Kanchanaburi** - Jungle rafts, minority villages and the infamous Bridge on the River Kwai

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Full on

Full on paced trips are for travellers who like their holidays packed with activities and experiences, moving on quickly from place to place with lots of early starts and long, busy days. Some may find them tiring, but others get a buzz from packing their precious holiday-time as chock-a-block full of new experiences as possible!

GROUP SIZE:

10 - 16

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join tour in Bangkok

Arrive Bangkok and check-in at the hotel. The rest of the day is free. You may choose to take an optional cruise along the city's Klongs (canals) in a traditional longtail boat. This is the ideal way to explore Bangkok's network of meandering waterways that branch off from the main channel of the Chao Phraya River. The excursion will also include visits to the Royal Barge Museum and the iconic Wat Arun, the Temple of the Dawn, which was built to represent the towering slopes of Mount Meru, the home to the gods of Khmer mythology.



Accommodation: Royal Princess Larn Luang Hotel (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - In Bangkok, visit Grand Palace; sleeper train to Chiang Mai

Our sightseeing tour this morning is on foot and includes the Grand Palace with its stunning Emerald Buddha and Wat Po (Temple of the Reclining Buddha). The afternoon is left free, then in the evening we board the overnight train for Chiang Mai.



Accommodation: Overnight Train from Bangkok to Chiang Mai



Simple Overnight Train



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Arrive in Chiang Mai; visit Doi Suthep temple; walking tour of Old Town

Chiang Mai offers a complete contrast and relief from the heat and noise of Bangkok. Its elevation is just over 300m, so the climate is most agreeable. Founded in the 13th century, it owes its prosperity mainly to the teak trade. Our sightseeing will include the famous Doi Suthep temple and an orientation walk of the old town.



Accommodation: The Park Hotel (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 4 - In Chiang Mai, included visit to Elephant Nature Park

This morning we head out to the Elephant Nature Park, one of the largest elephant conservation centres in Thailand. The park comprises of huge swathes of land for the elephants to roam in, along with an elephant nursery and hospital caring for sick and abandoned elephants. Its main function is for the treatment and care of rescued elephants although visitors and tourists are now admitted to assist and volunteer with the valuable conservation work. Our plan for the day will need to be flexible around the needs of the elephants, but is likely to include helping to feed the elephants from a viewing platform in the morning and in the afternoon we will walk down to the river with the elephants and centre's staff. Here we will help bathe these gentle giants as they splash around in the river, so be prepared to get wet! There are no elephant shows or elephant riding here, the day is all about spending quality time with these beautiful creatures and observing their natural behaviours when they are with their herd.



Accommodation: The Park Hotel (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - Drive to Si Satchanalai temple ruins en route to Sukhothai

Today we head south to Si Satchanalai the twin city to Sukhothai. Although architecturally very different, it is just as impressive in many ways with a variety of outside influences noticeable in the construction of the wats and chedis (religious memorials). The most impressive and most sacred is Wat Chang Lom. Situated in the heart of the old city it is decorated with 39 standing elephants and is unusual due to its Ceylonese-style chedi - the earliest of its kind in Thailand. After visiting the site we make our way to nearby Sukhothai.



Accommodation: Le Charme Sukhothai Resort (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - In Sukothai, explore old city ruins by bicycle; rice barge on Chao Phraya River to Uthai Thani

Today we explore (Old) Sukhothai by bicycle, the first capital of Siam; which was at the pinnacle of Thai civilisation for over 200 years up to the end of the 1400s. It then went into decline as Ayutthaya took over as the most important city in the area, and was deserted until it was discovered as a lost city in the jungle in the 19th Century. The city has now been fully excavated and it comprises 21 historical sites within the city walls and a further 70 outside. Leaving Sukhothai by bus, we drive to Phayuha Khiri where we embark on a leisurely cruise down the river aboard our converted rice barge. We enjoy dinner before disembarking at Uthai Thani for the night. We strongly recommend bringing your own cycle helmet for this activity, our local supplier are unable to provide any helmets for customers use.



Accommodation: Payamai Resort (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 7 - Visit morning market; travel by rice barge and bus to Ayutthaya; visit Royal Palace

This morning we plan a visit to a local market before re-boarding our rice barge once again. We will stop en route as we drift down the winding Chao Phraya River, giving us a real insight into the authentic life of the indigenous river dwellers and boat people. There's plenty of time to relax and enjoy the passing scenery. After lunch we arrive at Haopraya Dam and disembark. Heading south by bus we reach another of Siam's stunning ancient capitals, Ayutthaya. Situated on an island at the confluence of three rivers, the Chao Phraya, Pa Sak and Lopburi Rivers, Ayutthaya had a very strong defensive position and retained its power for over 400 years, during which time it became extremely wealthy. Now a UNESCO World Heritage site, the city is still a stunning complex of palaces, shrines, stupas and monasteries. We will include a walking tour to visit the Royal Palace and a few wats.



Accommodation: Ayothaya Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch

DAY 8 - Drive to Kanchanaburi; journey on Death Railway and by boat on River Kwai; overnight in raft houses

An early morning drive, by-passing Bangkok takes us to the River Kwai and Kanchanaburi, where we visit the war cemetery and the famous Bridge over the River Kwai. The building of the bridge and the Death Railway as it has become known, is one of the most infamous episodes of the Second World War. The Japanese built the railway to link Siam and Burma (Myanmar) using Prisoners of War between June 1942 and October 1943. It was to carry supplies to their fast expanding empire and by doing so it would cut almost 1300 miles off the sea route from Japan. The working conditions were atrocious and over 16000 allied troops lost their lives as well as an estimated 75,000 Asian forced labourers. We then take the train along part of the original route. We continue by bus to the Hellfire Pass and visit the Memorial Museum. Finally we transfer to longtail boats for a journey up the River Kwai to our Raft Houses, set in a tranquil location on the river's edge.



Accommodation: Jungle Raft (or similar)



Simple Raft House



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

DAY 9 - In Kanchanburi, take bamboo rafts on River Kwai; visit Mon minority village

We spend a full day here exploring the jungle and the river both on foot and by bamboo rafts. There may well also be a chance to witness wild elephants bathing in the nearby waters. A visit to nearby Mon minority villages will also be organised or you may choose to relax with an optional Thai massage. Alternatively you may prefer to simply relax in your raft house and watch the world go by.



Accommodation: Jungle Raft (or similar)



Simple Raft House



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 10 - Return to Bangkok by boat and bus

We head back by longtail boat to Pak Sang Pier this morning and join our vehicle for the drive to Bangkok.



Accommodation: Royal Princess Larn Luang Hotel (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 11 - Tour ends in Bangkok

Tour ends after breakfast. If you have time you may wish to wander through Chinatown for a different flavour of the city.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



Why book this trip

As one of our best selling tours this adventure to Thailand really gets under the skin of the destination and gives travellers an in-depth discovery of the history and culture of the country. Often associated only with beaches this trip is a revelation, as you will see ancient lost cities, journey by rice barge, and spend a night in a raft house on the legendary River Kwai. This is a great holiday for history lovers who want to understand the 'real' Thailand.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 9
Lunch: 3
Dinner: 3



Transport

Bus
Boat
Train



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Boat Crew
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)



Accommodation

4 nights premium hotel
3 nights standard hotel
1 nights simple overnight train
2 nights simple raft house

Trip information

Country information

Thailand Holidays & Tours

Climate

Generally hot with high humidity. There is some rainfall from April to September with most days being hot (around 33 Degrees) and a light breeze on the islands. If it does rain, it will be more of a heavy tropical downpour that lasts a few hours. Additional information and climate charts can be accessed at <http://www.explore.co.uk/weather>.

Time difference to GMT

+7

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Buddhism

Language

Thai

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

Bangkok - Longtail boat excursion on klongs including visit to Royal Barge Museum £14 Chiang Mai - Thai cooking course £23

Clothing

Pack essentially for hot weather. Lightweight rainwear is advisable all year. Shorts, open backed sandals and bare shoulders are not permitted in the Grand Palace in Bangkok.

Footwear

Comfy shoes, trainers & sandals.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

Should consist of a main piece of baggage and a daypack large enough to carry clothes for an overnight stop.

Equipment

Bring a torch and waterbottle.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour. Accordingly you should allow approximately £25.

Country Information

Thailand Holidays & Tours

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Dinner price

£4.00 - 8.00

Beer price

£1.5

Water price

£0.5

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Thai Baht

Recommended Currency For Exchange

We recommend that you bring your money in GBP or US\$.

Where To Exchange

Most major towns and on the islands - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

ATMs are available in Bangkok but are limited on the islands.

Credit Card Acceptance

Major stores and restaurants.

Travellers Cheques

Can be exchanged at banks and exchange offices throughout the tour although rates may not be as favourable.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, Boat, Train

Essential information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa Information

Thailand: Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens for a stay of less than 30 days. All passports must have at least 6 months validity remaining on entry to Thailand. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

Transfers

Find out more about [Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions](#) before you book.

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer click [here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

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Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and infectious hepatitis. Although not compulsory, travellers may also wish to immunise themselves against Japanese encephalitis. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on Malaria and Zika Virus. Please take preventative measures to avoid mosquito bites - these include mosquito repellent as well as long trousers and long sleeve shirts to cover up when necessary. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.