

the ultimate
CHIANG RAI
travel guide



Why You Need to Visit Chiang Rai

Most people say there aren't many things to do in Chiang Rai. And since you've downloaded this guide, I guess you already kind of know that.

All other Chiang Rai travel guides cover attractions near the town such as; White Temple, Black House, the Clock Tower. Sure, these are interesting, and you should visit them, but there is so much more to be discovered.

The reality is that most travellers don't go beyond the town, and really miss out loads of amazing things to do in Chiang Rai.

Chiang Rai has a very diverse culture. There are the people of Northern Thailand which speak their own dialect of Thai called *Lanna*. Then there are the countless ethnic villagers such as Lahu, Karen, and Hmong which have lived in the mountains around the borders of Cambodia, Laos, China and Thailand for centuries. They maintain age old traditions not seen elsewhere in Thailand.

The nature in Chiang Rai is stunning. While living there I discovered beautiful waterfalls, amazing mountain hikes, relaxing hot springs, and even a beach! I explored by longtail boat down and upriver, motorbiked off-beat trails in the national park, and cruised about town in a Tuk-Tuk after one too many beers.

Chiang Rai is no doubt an incredible place. Now I want to share my experience with you.

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Where is Chiang Rai?

Chiang Rai is located in the far north of Thailand. It is the most northern province in Thailand, about 2 hours north of Chiang Mai by road (car, bus, motorbike).

That's right, there is more than one *Chiang* in the north of Thailand, and you're about to learn of more soon!

Chiang Rai borders the provinces of Chiang Mai, Lampang, and Phayao from southwest to southeast. You might never have heard of these and I suggest visiting them too if you have time.

Chiang Rai shares international borders with Laos and Myanmar. All three countries meet at the point known as *The Golden Triangle*.

Travel just another 130km north of Chiang Rai and you will reach Yunnan in China. Now you can imagine how diverse the culture in Chiang Rai is!

You should also know that “Chiang Rai” refers to the province in Thailand. “Mueang Chiang Rai” refers to the town itself within that province.

Mueang Chiang Rai is the largest town in the province, however there are quite a few other interesting towns like Mae Sai, Chiang Kong and Chiang Sean which we'll see later in the guide.



How to Get to Chiang Rai

Bus – Chiang Mai to Chiang Rai

The best way to get from Chiang Mai to Chiang Rai is the Green Bus. It is the quickest, most comfortable, and most frequent public transport option.

Tickets start from 129 THB (USD 3) per person. A one-way journey takes about 3hrs.

There are multiple buses departing each day. This is the latest timetable from the GreenBus. [Pre-book tickets on 12GO Asia](#) to ensure you don't miss a seat (note: there is a small surcharge by booking online through this platform).

Note that Chiang Rai has two bus terminals; Terminal 1 in the centre for local buses, and Terminal 2 6km away for intercity buses. A local bus connects the two terminals for 15 THB.

[Book Bus Tickets](#)

Route 166 Chiangmai - Chiangrai

Chiangmai - Chiangrai			Chiangrai - Chiangmai		
Depart	Arrive	Class	Depart	Arrive	Class
6:45	9:45	V-Class	06:15	09:45	A-Class
7:15	10:35	X-Class	07:30	10:30	V-Class
8:15	11:15	V-Class	08:15	11:35	X-Class
08:45	12:05	X-Class	09:15	12:15	V-Class
09:15	12:45	A-Class	09:45	13:05	X-Class
09:45	13:05	X-Class	10:15	13:35	X-Class
10:00	13:20	X-Class	11:15	14:15	V-Class
10:30	13:30	V-Class	12:00	15:20	X-Class
11:00	14:20	X-Class	12:45	15:45	V-Class
11:30	14:50	X-Class	13:15	16:45	A-Class
12:15	15:15	V-Class	13:45	17:05	X-Class
12:30	16:00	A-Class	14:15	17:35	X-Class
13:00	16:00	V-Class	15:00	18:20	X-Class
14:15	17:35	X-Class	15:30	18:30	V-Class
15:00	18:20	X-Class	16:00	19:20	X-Class
15:45	18:45	V-Class	16:30	19:50	X-Class
17:00	20:20	X-Class	17:00	20:00	V-Class
17:30	21:00	A-Class	17:15	20:45	A-Class
18:00	21:00	V-Class	17:30	20:50	X-Class
(Fri,Sun)6:30pm	9:50pm	X-Class	18:00	21:00	V-Class
(Fri,Sun)7:00pm	10:20pm	X-Class	(Fri,Sun)6:00pm	9:00pm	V-Class
			(Fri,sun)6:45pm	10:05pm	X-Class
			(Fri,Sun)7:30pm	10:50pm	X-Class

Ticket Fee:

- V-Class 258 Baht
- X-Class 166 Baht
- A-Class 129 Baht

Slow Boat – Chiang Rai to Luang Prabang

The slow boat from Luang Prabang to Chiang Rai is a popular route for travellers heading from Thailand to Laos or vice versa. The slow boat departs from Huay Xai, a small border town 65km away. You will need to get a minivan from Chiang Rai's Bus Terminal 2 which takes about 1hr 30min.

Trains – None

Despite what others may tell you, there is no train to Chiang Rai. You can, however, take a train from Bangkok to Chiang Mai ([tickets and timetables](#)). After the 14-hour train, you then take the Green Bus from Chiang Mai to Chiang Rai.

Flights – Domestic Routes

Chiang Rai has a domestic terminal with daily flights from major airports including Bangkok, Phuket and Chiang Mai. Popular budget airlines include:

- AirAsia Thailand (\$)
- Nok Air (\$\$)
- Thai Smile (\$\$\$)
- Bangkok Airways (\$\$\$)

Bangkok to Chiang Rai – there are 6 daily flights with AirAsia, and another 5 daily flights with Not Air. The flight duration is 1hr 30 min direct. Flights typically cost less than USD 100 per person, one way, but are generally more expensive on public holidays and long weekends.

Hat Yai to Chiang Rai – there is 1 daily flight with AirAsia, and another 5 daily flights with Nok Air. The flight is just over 2hrs direct and typically costs about USD 140. It saves many hours of travel compared to the bus and train options.

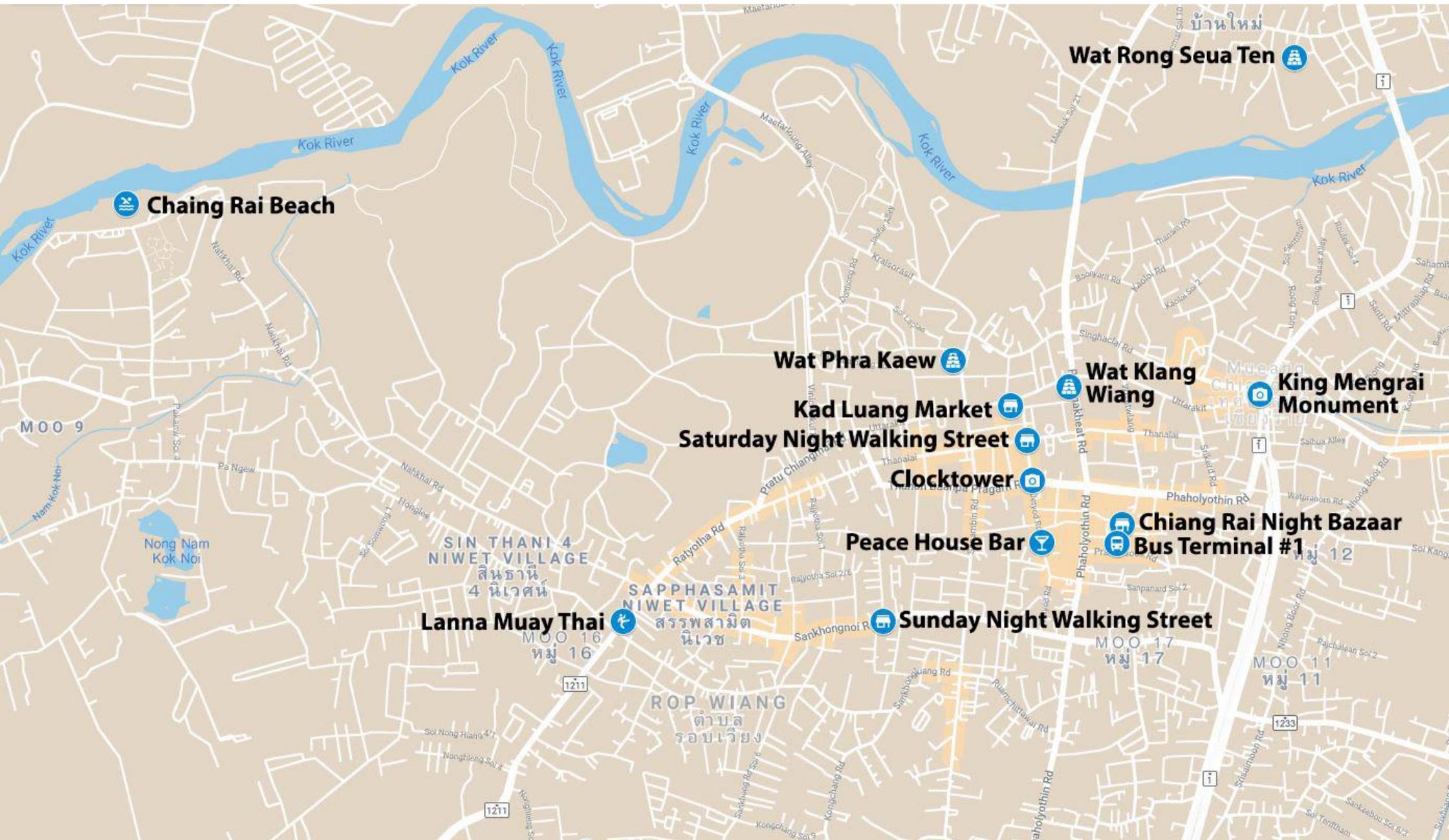
Maps of Chiang Rai

On the next few pages I have included maps of Chiang Rai town and the province with loads of destinations pinned for your trip planning.

If you have an internet connection while traveling I highly suggest checking out my [interactive map of Chiang Rai](#).

[Open Your Interactive Chiang Rai Map](#)

(internet connection needed for interactive map)



Attractions in Town

There are lots of temples, markets, monuments, and restaurants within walking distance of town centre. These are the perfect if you have only one day in Chiang Rai.

If you have multiple days in Chiang Rai, then you might like to start your morning with a walk around town visiting some of these destinations before heading further afield.

The town centre is marked by the ornate Chiang Rai Clocktower (pictured right). Each of the following destinations note how long it takes to walk from there.

RECOMMENDED: Wat Phra Kaew

Wat Phra Kaew (temple of the Emerald Buddha) is one of the oldest temples in all of Chiang Rai. It dates back to the 14th Century.

This is the original location of the Emerald Buddha, the most highly regarded Buddhist statue in Thailand. This statue has now been relocated to Bangkok's super iconic Wat Phra Kaew (The Grand Palace).

Wat Phra Kaew feels a lot less touristy than the other popular temples, so if you're after an authentic part of Chiang Rai, this is the place to visit.

Opening hours: 7am to 6pm

Get there: a 10 minute walk from the Clocktower along Kraisorasit Road



Chiang Rai Clocktower

The Chiang Rai clock tower is a popular monument and artwork to visit right in the centre of town. It is probably the most intricately designed round-a-bout in the world. People will often plan to meet at the Clocktower as it is impossible to miss.

The Chiang Rai clocktower was designed by Chalermchai Kositpipat, the same Thai artist who decorated the iconic White Temple just south of Chiang Rai. Many of his other Buddhist artworks which have been exhibited worldwide and highly regarded by Thailand's Royal Family.

The clocktower lights up for a brief show every night at 7pm, 8pm, and 9pm bang on the hour. Don't be late or you will miss it.

Opening hours: all day, every day

Get there: right in the centre of town, easy walking distance



Image credit: [Stefan Fussan / Flickr](#)

Wat Klang Wiang

Wat Klang Waing dates back to the 15th century. Apart from the White Temple, this is one of the most ornate temples in Chiang Rai. A small pillar in the temple grounds marks the centre of Chiang Rai.

Wat Klang Wiang is far less touristy than the other major temples with quite an authentic feel. It's well worth visiting on a walk around town.

Opening hours: 6am to 5pm

Get there: a 7 minute walk from the Clocktower along Rattanakhet Road

Saturday Night Walking Street

The Saturday Night Walking Street is similar to Chiang Mai's Walking Street. Expect a huge open-air market sprawling all over the road with loads of food, clothes, and other goods for sale. It is a fun place to hang out at night and an easy place to meet other travellers.

Opening hours: 5pm to just after midnight

Get there: a 5-minute walk from the Clocktower along Thanalai Road.

Sunday Night Walking Street

The Sunday Night Walking Street (Happy Street) is located just behind Chiang Rai Hospital. It is quite similar to the Saturday Night Walking Street with lots of street stalls, food arts, and crafts. If you can't decide which of walking street to visit, just do both!

Opening hours: 5pm to about 11pm

Get there: less than a 10-minute walk from the Clocktower.

Chiang Rai Night Bazaar

The Chiang Rai Night Bazaar is a popular place to hang out at night for good food and cold beer, albeit more touristy than the two walking streets. Some nights have live music, theatre or Thai comedy shows. The stalls around the Chiang Rai Night Bazaar offer a wide range of handmade goods from the surrounding ethnic villages. You can also find other typical market type goods such as clothing, food, and painting by local artists.

Opening hours: 6pm to midnight daily (Monday to Sunday)

Get there: a 5-minute walk from the Clocktower.

Kad Luang Market

The Kad Luang Market is a massive local market with a very authentic vibe. You will find all sorts of goods here including clothing, electronics, fresh fruit and vegetables, street food vendors, and oh so much more. It is essentially a fresh market on steroids.

The best way to explore the market is simply to walk in and aimlessly wander around the small, almost claustrophobic alleyways. The market seamlessly merges into the morning market to make one huge hive of activity.

My tip: the late night vendors selling fried chicken and roti work wanders after a few too many beers on Jet Yod Road. You won't regret it.

Opening hours: different parts of it are open all day (24hrs)

Get there: a 5-minute walk from the Clocktower

Train Muay Thai

Where better to start your Muay Thai future than in the north of Thailand? Lanna Fighting Muay Thai Gym teaches a traditional Lanna (northern) style of fighting. They focus more on posture and technique than on hardcore cardio.

The trainers here have toured internationally fighting and performing traditional Muay Thai shows, so they really know their stuff. A session typically runs for 1.5 hours which will leave you completely exhausted.

The best way to get in touch with Lanna Fighting Gym is to send them a message on Facebook Chat. [See their official Facebook page here.](#) Note that their website has been down multiple times recently.



Chiang Rai Beach

Going to the beach in Chiang Rai sounds odd but it is actually quite simple (and a great local's destination). This beach is obviously not by the ocean, but about 4 kilometres outside of town along the Kok River.

It is safe to swim or tube down the river in the dry season from October to March. Be careful in the wet season as the current gets very strong and the lack of lifeguards can make it a bit dangerous.

After a swim you can get lunch and some drinks (water, shakes or beers) in one of the nice bamboo huts. Food and drinks are cheap and fresh.

Opening hours: open all day, every day, don't swim at night

Get there: 10 minutes by motorbike or *songtaew*, or a 45-minute walk.



Image credit: [Maxim B. / Flickr](#)

King Mengrai Monument

The King Mengrai Monument is a shrine dedicated to the famous King Mengrai who established the Lanna Kingdom of northern Thailand in 1296.

The ancient Lanna Kingdom included the region around Chiang Rai, Chiang Saen, and Chiang Mai. It was independent to the ancient kingdom of Siam based in Ayutthaya. Over the years many wars were fought between the two kingdoms.

Opening hours: all day

Get there: a 15-minute walk from the Clocktower.

Where to Eat

Northern Thailand has a unique cuisine, notably different than Central or Southern Thailand. It is commonly referred to as Lanna Thai cuisine. Expect creamy soups (Khao Soi) and spicy minced sausages (Sai Ua) to be abundant in restaurants here.

Of course you can still find your staple Thai dishes around town like Pad Thai, fried rice, noodle soups. Here are a couple of the top restaurants and popular eateries.

Khao Soi Phor Jai

Khao Soi is a rich creamy moreish northern Thai soup usually served with a chicken leg, topped with crunchy noodles, and a side of condiments such as pickled onion, chili paste and lemon. It is one of those must have dishes in northern Thailand, and nowhere does it better than Khao Soi Phor Jai.

This shop is located about 150 meters south of the Chiang Rai clocktower along Jet Yod Road. They are open for breakfast and lunch.

Location: 1023/3 Jetyod Rd, เมืองเชียงราย Mueang Chiang Rai District, Chiang Rai 57000, Thailand

Night Bazaar

For all your typical Thai foods you can visit the Chiang Rai Night Bazaar right next to Chiang Rai Bus Terminal 1. As the name suggests, this place is open at night, for dinner. Mornings are lifeless here.

Si Trang Restaurant

Here you will find a whole range of northern style Thai curries and other staple Thai dishes. The food is set out in trays in a glass window in a style Thais refer to as Khao Gaeng (literally translating to *cover rice with curry*). Pick out the dishes you want There's no need to read Thai menus here!

This shop is located about 150 metres west of the clocktower. It is an easy walk for breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

Location: Thanon Baanpa Pragarn Rd, Rop Wiang Sub-district, Mueang Chiang Rai District, Chiang Rai 57000, Thailand

Nam Ngiao Pa Suk

Nam Ngiao is another great northern Thai dish that you have to try, and perhaps the most popular with the locals. This dish is a stew with tomato, chili and beef or pork bones. It's served with rice noodles, and cubes of blood cake (though you can ask to leave them out). You will get a similar set of condiments as with Khao Soi; chili paste, lemon.

This shop is located about a 15 minute walk from the clocktower, along Sankhongnoi Road, where the Sunday Night Walking Street.

Location: 197 Sankhongnoi Rd, ตำบลเวียง Mueang Chiang Rai District, Chiang Rai 57000, Thailand

Cycle through rural Chiang Rai with lots of local food

[Check out this awesome private day trip with TakeMeTour](#)

[Learn More](#)

Temples

Discover the iconic White Temple, the Blue Temple, Black House, the huge Nagpa Snake, and many other lesser known Buddhist temples across town.

Blue Temple (Wat Rong Suea Ten)

Wat Rong Suea was abandoned over 80 years ago and restorations were only recently completed in 2005. Since then it has grown in popularity and become one of the most photographed destinations around town.

The temple is located about 2 kilometres north of town across the Kok River (much closer than the White Temple or Black House).

Opening hours: 8am to 5pm daily (Monday to Sunday).

Get there: it is possible to walk or cycle from town. Otherwise a quick ride in a songtaew or a tuk tuk is probably the better option.

Wat Phra That Doi Khao Kwai

Little known to tourists, Wat Phra That Doi is a temple built up on top of Khao Kwai (Buffalo Hill). The road to the top is steep, but the viewpoint offers a beautiful view looking out over the small lake Nong Bueng and the surrounding rice fields. Visit around sunset for the best view.

Opening hours: open all day

Get there: a 10-minute motorbike or songtaew trip from town, or a 30-minute walk from town.



RECOMMENDED: White Temple (Wat Rong Khun)

The White Temple is Chiang Rai's most iconic attraction. Both the interior and exterior work by local artist Chalermchai Kositpipat are amazing. A 2014 earthquake damaged some of the artwork which temporarily closed the White Temple for restoration, however it is now reopened to the public.

Opening hours: 6.30am to 6pm daily (Monday to Sunday)

How to get there: The White Temple is located 13km south of Chiang Rai. A taxi costs about 300THB one way. The cheaper option is to take the local 'Blue Bus' from Chiang Rai Bus Terminal 1. The bus costs 20THB one way and takes about 20 minutes.

The Blue Bus departs Chiang Rai Bus Terminal 1 at the following times:

- Mornings: 06:15, 07:10, 08:10, 09:10.
- 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM bus every 30 minutes.
- Afternoons: 14:35, 15:10, 15:45, 16:20, 17:00



Image credit: [Fighting Irish / Flickr](#)

Wat Huay Pla Kang

Wat Huay Pla Kang is one of the newest additions to the list of ornate temples in Chiang Rai. The huge statue of Bodhisattva Guan Yin, which is commonly mistaken for a Buddha, is visible from many parts of town. Right next to this huge statue you will find the 9-storey pagoda with two giant Naga Snake handrails out the front. You can climb to the top of the pagoda (or take the lift for 40 THB) for a great view looking over Chiang Rai.

Get there: located about 6 kilometers north west of town. There is no public transport here, so you either need to take a songtaew or a motorbike from town.

Tip: recommend visiting with a trip to Mae Sai Waterfall.



Black House (Baan Dam)

Many people refer to the Black House as the Black Temple thereby drawing a similarity to the White Temple. The Black House (Baan Dam) is actually not a temple but the house of Thai artist Thawan Duchanee. There are a few buildings to explore in the grounds of the Black House each with an odd collection of artefacts.

Opening hours: 9am to 5pm daily. Closed 12pm to 1pm for lunch.

Get there: (1) charter a songtaew roundtrip from town for 300 THB (USD 10). (2) Take the Green Bus towards Mae Sai from Chiang Rai Bus Terminal 1 for 20 THB (USD 0.80), the one way and takes 20 minutes. Coming back, you will need to walk out to the main road and wave down any passing buss to hop on board, there is no bus stop here.

Tip: recommend visiting with a trip to Bandu Market and Art Bridge Gallery

Waterfalls

There is no better way to appreciate Thailand's nature than to visit a waterfall (*namtok* in Thai). Hike through the jungle for an hour to discover an incredible 70-meter tall stream pouring over a cliff, take a cool shower right underneath, or simply laze back in the gardens.

Here you will find a handful of waterfalls around Chiang Rai. Some are well known, others are local secrets. With a few days available, I highly recommend visiting at least two or three of these amazing waterfalls.

Huay Mae Sai Waterfall

Huay Mae Sai Waterfall is a great small waterfall near Chiang Rai. Hardly anyone knows about it. This small two-tiered waterfall is located 19km from the town in the middle of the forest, nearby a nice Lahu Ethnic Hill Tribe.

There is a short 15 to 20-minute walk from the lower parking area to the Huay Mae Sai Waterfall, quite slippery when wet. At the end, you will find two levels Huay Mae Sai waterfall. The lower level has a deeper pool of water and is great for swimming. The upper level has a taller waterfall and a good place to sunbake on the rocks.

Get there: Huay Mae Sai waterfall is not known to many western tourists and is not offered on tour packages. The best way of getting to Huay Mae Sai waterfall is by motorbike or to arrange private transport. There is no public transport servicing this waterfall.

Opening hours: all day daily, there is no National Park administration.



RECOMMENDED: Khun Korn Waterfall

At over 70 metres tall, Khun Korn Waterfall is the tallest waterfall in northern Thailand. It is located in the Namtok Khun Korn Forest Park about 30 kilometres east of Chiang Rai. Unlike many other Thai national parks, the entry to this one is free!

Once at the park entrance, Khun Korn Waterfall is reached by a 1.5km trek through the forest. Be sure to have a shower right under the waterfall.

Get there: there is no public transport to the waterfall, you will need to hire a motorbike or charter a songtaew in town. The best place to do this is around the Clocktower or Jet Yod Road.

Opening hours: 8am to 4.30pm daily (Monday to Sunday). The waterfall can occasionally be closed after heavy rains in the wet season for safety.

Huay Kaew Waterfall

Do not confuse this with the Huay Kaew Waterfall in Chiang Mai.

The Huay Kaew Waterfall is a beautiful two-tiered waterfall, located far out in the forest. Hardly any tourists make it out this far, and most that do are on long hiking tours to the Pha Soet Village, an Akha Hill Tribe.

The road to Huay Kaew Waterfall in Chiang Rai is a steep and badly potholed dirt/concrete trail. The route follows the Kok River before heading deep into the forest.

Near the end, you will pass tea plantations and the Pha Soet Village before arriving at a sign for the waterfall. There is a short and fairly easy walk from the village to the waterfall.

Get there: there is no public transport to Huay Kaew Waterfall. Hire a motorbike or charter a *songtaew* in town. The journey takes about 45 minutes one way. Only take a motorbike if you are a confident rider.

Opening hours: all day daily, there is no National Park administration

Pong Phrabat Waterfall

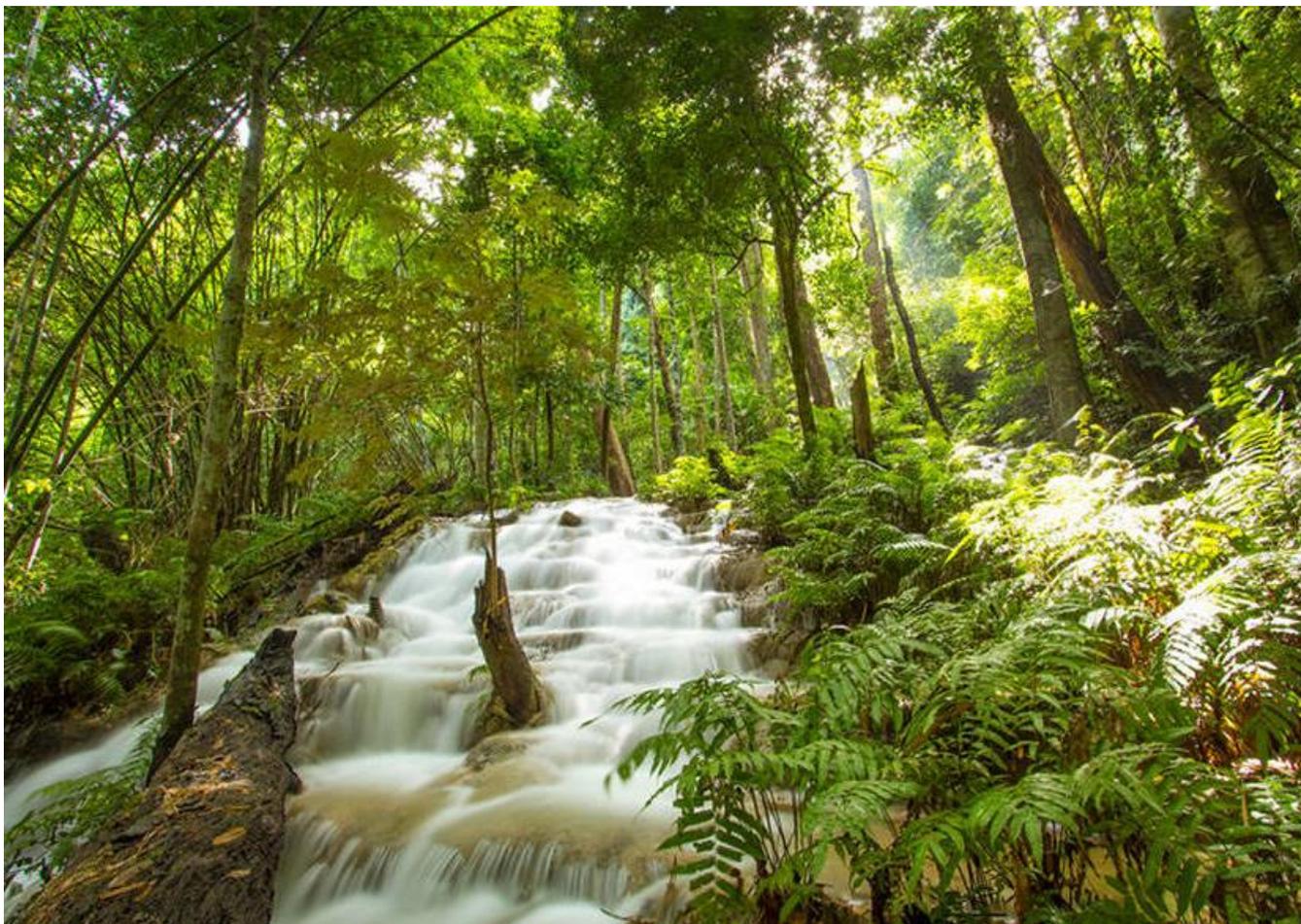
The Pong Phrabat waterfall is located 14km north of Chiang Rai in the Lam Nam Kok National Park. The entrance to the waterfall is at the end of a long road veering off to the mountains behind the Rajabhat University. You will find the National Park HQ at the end of the road. From there it is an easy walk to the Phong Phrabat Waterfall itself.

The waterfall is a small cascading stream, nothing like the huge Khun Korn Waterfall. There is a pool deep enough for swimming in, and some grass to lay back and relax in the forest.

The area nearby the National Park HQ makes for a great picnic location. You may see many locals hanging out here, especially students from the nearby Rajabhat University.

Get there: there is no public transport to Pong Phrabat Waterfall. Hire a motorbike or charter a *songtaew* in town. The journey will take about 25 minutes one way

Opening hours: 8am to 4.30pm daily (National Park opening hours)



Pu Kaeng Waterfall

Pu Kaeng Waterfall has 9 beautiful levels flowing through the jungle. The hike from bottom to top takes about 45 minutes one way. The trail is an adventure, slippery and overgrown, as not many people visit.

Pu Kaeng waterfall is located about 70km south of Chiang Rai near to Pan district, in the Doi Luang National Park. This is at least a half day trip.

Get there: Hire a motorbike or charter a songtaew in Chiang Rai. The journey takes about 1.5hrs one way following Phahonyothin Road south towards Chiang Mai. The waterfall sign is on the opposite side of the road.

Opening hours: 8am to 4.30pm daily (National Park opening hours)

Entry fees: National Park entry fees are 200 THB per person plus a vehicle entry fee.

Art Galleries

Chiang Rai is the art capital of Thailand with a huge range of talented artists living here turning out some amazing artworks from landscape painting to modern sculptures.

Art Bridge Chiang Rai

The Art Bridge Gallery is located at the turnoff to Chiang Rai International Airport (Mae Fah Luang Airport) and hosts the works of many local Chiang Rai artists. The collection changes every few months. Expect to find huge panorama paintings of the northern Thailand landscape, modern art and a collection of sculptures.

The Art Bridge gallery is best visited together with a trip to the Black House (Baan Daam).

How to get there: charter a songtaew from town for a round trip for about 300 THB. The cheaper option is to take the Green Bus going to Mae Sai from Chiang Rai Bus Terminal 1. The bus costs 20THB one way and takes about 15 minutes. Coming back, you will need to walk out to the main road and wave down any passing buss to hop on board, there is no bus stop here.

Opening hours: 10am to 7pm daily (Monday to Sunday)

RECOMMENDED:

Chalermchai Kostipipat Hall of Masterwork

This amazing art gallery is located right next door to the White Temple. I'm always surprised by how little people make the effort to walk an extra 20 meters, but I highly recommend it. The art in here is possibly more impressive than the temple itself.

There is a mixture of artworks in this gallery by both Chalermchai and by his students. You will find a lot of intricate paintings in his Buddhist inspired White Temple style art.

How to get there: right across the road from the White Temple, see directions.

Opening hours: 8am to 5pm daily (Monday to Sunday)

Mountains

Chiang Rai is surrounded by mountains on the east along Laos, and the west along Myanmar. Enjoy the amazing panoramic views while visiting the ethnic villages.

Doi Mae Salong

Doi Mae Salong is located in north-western Chiang Rai and just 6km from Myanmar. The peak at an elevation of 1,367m is accessed via a very steep road. The area around Doi Mae Salong is home to many ethnic villages, tea, fruit and coffee plantations.

The most popular time to visit Doi Mae Salong is between December and January when flowers bloom all over the mountain. Doi Mae Salong is best reached by spending a night in the village of Tha Ton from where you can take songtaew in the early morning.

How to get there: There is no public transport so you either have to hire car/motorbike in town or charter car with a driver.



RECOMMENDED: Phu Chi Fa Lookout

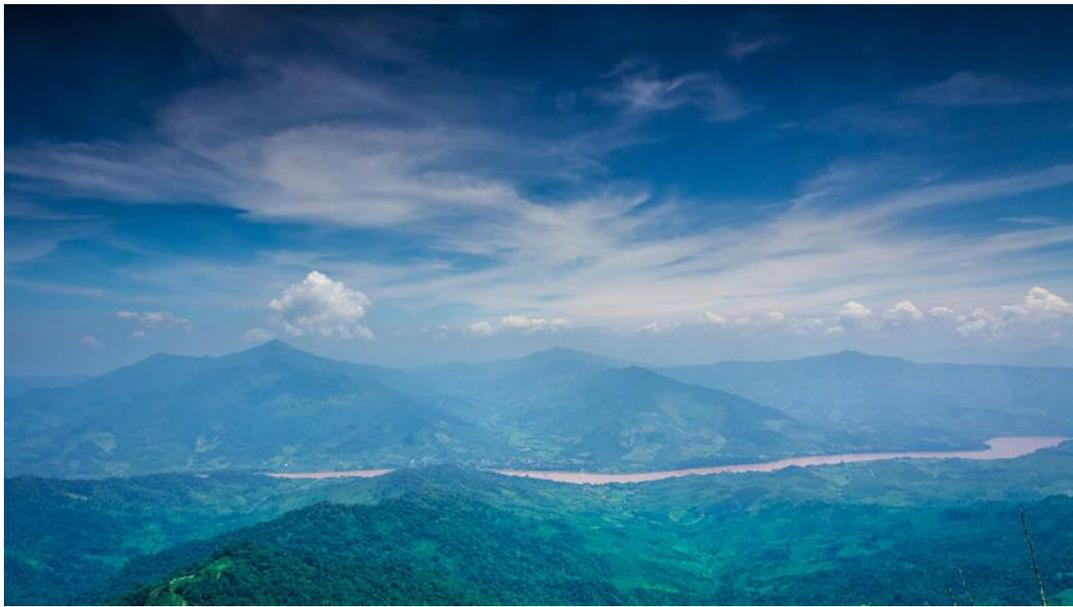
Phu Chi Fa is the most amazing sunrise viewpoint in Thailand. You can stand above the clouds and admire the view of rural Laos in the valley.

To see sunrise, you'll need to start the 1km hike to the peak by about 5am. The walk is steep and slippery in parts. You should spend about an hour at the summit enjoying the views. There are also some small trails where you can wander along the mountain ridge forming the Thai-Laos border.

There are some very secluded mountain villages near Phu Chi Fa, like Ban Rak Phaen about 20 minutes to the south east. Here you can explore the small streets by foot and have a chat with the locals. The villagers don't generally speak English or Thai but their own ethnic language.

How to get there: Phu Chi Fa is a 2.5-hour drive from Chiang Rai. There's no public transport so you will have to hire car/motorbike in town or charter car with a driver (see our options at the end of this guide book).

Note: to see sunrise in a one-day trip from Chiang Rai, you will have to depart town by 3am. This is only possible with private transport.



Doi Pha Tang

Doi Pha Tang is located 30km north of Phu Chi Fa, near a small Chinese village called Ban Pha Tang. The road to the peak of Doi Pha Tang is a badly potholed and steep 1km ascent. It is another 1km walk from the carpark to the summit of Doi Pha Tang at 1,909m high.

The peak of Doi Pha Tang offers a stunning 360-degree view of Laos and Thailand divided by the Mekong River. The small trails along the mountain ridge offer a scenic view, so spend a few hours up here. If you take your own tent you can camp on the summit.

Stop at Ban Pha Tang to try out the local foods such the stewed pork and steamed buns. You will find this store at the bottom of the steep road which heads up to Doi Patang.

How to get there: Doi Patang 3 hour drive from Chiang Rai. There is no public transport, so you must hire car/motorbike in town or charter car with a driver. It is best to combine Doi Pha Tang with a trip to Phu Chi Fa.

Doi Tung

Doi Tung is another mountain in Chiang Rai located to the north of the province, by the Myanmar border. There are ethnic villages and tea plantations around the area to explore. Doi Tung is best visited on a day trip up to the Mae Sai Tachilek border gate.

There are 6 main attractions to visit at Doi Tung including;

- Colour of Doi Tung Festival – shop and local foods
- Mae Fah Lunag Gardens – a garden with lots of beautiful flowers
- Doi Tung Royal Villa – a villa for the Princess Mother
- Hall of Inspiration – a museum of the Thai Royal Family
- Mah Fah Luang Arboretum – see amazing views of Myanmar
- Doi Tung Treetop Walk – a raised walkway through the trees

How to get there: Doi Tung is approximately 60km north of Chiang Rai town. There is a public bus number 619 from Chiang Rai to Mae Sai which departs every few hours from 12.50pm. From the bus stop at Baan Huay Krai you will need to take another songtaew to Doi Tung. Alternatively charter a songtaew or rent a car directly from Chiang Rai.

Hot Springs

While the rest of Thailand is steamy hot, Chaing Rai's winter drops to freezing. It is the perfect time to soak away in a hot spring while admiring the nature around you.

Huay Mak Liam Hot Spring

The Huay Mak Liam Hot Spring is located along the Kok River in the Lam Nam Kok National Park, about 24km north-west of Chiang Rai. This is one of the nicest hot springs in Chiang Rai. The hot spring is set in a relaxing forest surrounding with a water temperature of 65 degrees Celcius.

How to get there: For an adventure hire a motorbike or 4WD in Chiang Rai. Alternatively, take a longtail boat upriver from the Chiang Rai pier located by the Mae Fah Luang Bridge.

Opening hours: 8am to 4.30pm daily (follows National Park hours).

Pong Phrabat Hot Spring

The Pong Phrabat Hot Spring is the closest to Chiang Rai, located just 11km north of town. The water is naturally heated however the hot spring is concreted and tiled. Don't expect a scenic setting like the other hot springs in the National Park.

How to get there: there is no public transport to Pong Phrabat Hot Spring. A motorbike or *songtaew* rip takes about 25min – best to combine with Pong Phrabat Waterfall.

Opening hours: 8am to 8pm daily (subject to change)

Entry fee: 20 THB per person.



RECOMMENDED: Nam Roo (Secret) Hot Spring

Set high up in the mountains, Nam Roo Hot Spring is the closest you'll get to a natural infinity pool. The view over the mountains is incredible.

Nam Roo Hot Spring is not marked on maps, nor is it known by western tourists. There are signs along the way from Fang, though it can be tough following the way. If going there I suggest you use these co-ordinates on a map (19°55'19.9"N 99°06'27.6"E).

How to get there: there is no public transport to Fang Hot Spring. Hire a motorbike in Chiang Rai or charter a driver in Fang – best to combine with a trip to Fang Hot Spring.

Opening hours: 8am to 4.30pm daily (National Park opening hours).

Entry fee: 200 THB per person.



Fang Hot Spring

Fang Hot Spring is located in the Doi Pha Hom Pok National Park about 2 hours from town. It's in Chiang Mai Province, but easier to reach from Chiang Rai. There is a natural geyser by the park entrance which erupts every 10 minutes or so up to a height of 50 meters.

There are private hot spring houses within walking distance of the geyser. They are some of the best hot springs in northern Thailand. You will have to pay an additional hourly fee to use the private rooms.

How to get there: there is no public transport to Fang Hot Spring. Hire a motorbike in Chiang Rai or charter a driver in Fang.

Opening hours: 8am to 4.30pm daily (National Park opening hours).

Entry fees: National park entry fees are 300 THB per person plus a vehicle entry fee. The journey will take about 1.5hrs one way.

Pong Phra Soet Hot Spring

The Pong Phra Soet Hot Spring is also located in the Lam Nam Kok National Park. It is only 1km away from the Huay Mak Liam Hot Spring and is in a similar natural forest surrounding by the Kok River. There is a large outdoor pool for the general public and 8 private spa rooms which can be reserved.

How to get there: For an adventure hire a motorbike or 4WD in Chiang Rai. Alternatively, take a longtail boat upriver from the Chiang Rai pier located by the Mae Fah Luang Bridge.

Opening hours: 8am to 4.30pm daily (follows the National Park opening hours) however you may be able to get in after hours as there is no administration office here.

Towns

Chiang Rai is just one of many towns in the province. To see what the rest of Chiang Rai looks like you should visit one or more of the following towns. Each town has its own unique attractions. With one week to spend in Chiang Rai, you may as well them all.



Chiang Khong

Chiang Khong is a sleepy little town situated along the Mekong River across the water from Laos. There are a whole line of hotels where you can enjoy the river view with a Laotian mountain backdrop.

The city itself isn't so much of a traveller's destination, rather a stopover for those crossing to Laos, or traveling around the northern Thai border from the mountains to Mai Sai.

If staying in Chiang Kong you should not miss the early morning procession of monks. The monks walk the streets at around 6am to fill the alms with food offerings. It is a cultural experience not to be missed.

I highly suggest staying a night at the Fortune River View. It is incredibly cheap for a luxury hotel and offers a great view of the Mekong River.

Stay Here: [Fortune River View](#).



Mae Sai

Mae Sai is located 60km north of Chiang Rai on the Thai-Myanmar border. In the past, Mae Sai was a popular crossing point for "border runs" a quick and cheap way to extend tourist visas for an additional 14 days.

These days the Myanmar border market is the main attraction. Here you can find a wide range of knock-off goods, terrible cigarettes, and questionable Burmese whiskey. Most people only head across the border to Tachilek for an hour or so, but it is also possible to stay for a couple of nights in a hotel near the market.

You can also apply for a special permit before crossing the border to venture deeper into Myanmar to the Kentung district.



Chiang Saen

Chiang Saen is located 50km north of Chiang Kong. It is home to a city of ancient temples dating back to the year 1325, well before Ayutthaya.

The most popular attraction here is the Golden Triangle, where Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar borders meet. They are divided by the Mekong and Ruak rivers. The Golden Triangle is really just a quick photo stop though.

Spend your time in Chiang Saen exploring the ancient temples such as; Wat Pa Sak, Wat Phra That Chedi Luang, Wat Roi Ko, and Wat Phra Buat. They are all located within Chiang Saen's Old City precinct and are within walking distance of each other.

Suggested Itineraries

Note: to fit this many destinations into a single day, I highly suggest negotiating a day rate with a songtaew driver in town. You should be able to get this for under 2,000 THB which can be split between up to 8 people (or more if the driver permits).

One Day in Chiang Rai – Key Attractions

- Early Morning – explore two temples around the centre of town such as Wat Phra Kaew and Wat Klang Waing. This will give you a more authentic view into the local lifestyle.
- Mid-Morning – spend about 30 minutes visiting the White Temple. When finished, be sure to visit the Chalermchai Kostipat Hall of Masterwork rightnext door. This is equally as impressive as the temple and hardly anyone knows about it.
- Early Afternoon – continue to Khun Korn Waterfall. The drive takes about half an hour by car, followed by a 1.5km hike before reaching the waterfall. You can have a shower right underneath this impressivve waterfall.
- Late Afternoon – visit the Clocktower at 7pm or 8pm to see it light up and do it's short show.
- Night – on weekdays visit the Night Bazaar for food and drinks. On weekends visit the walkings streets as this is where all te action will be.

Two Days in Chiang Rai – Mountain Adventurer

Use your first day as per the one-day itinerary to the left. This will give you your dose of temples and a beautiful waterfall.

- Early Morning to Afternoon - on the second day you can visit the mountain ranges along the Thailand-Laos border to the east. You will either need to hire a car or arrange a private driver for the day. The driver option is typically around 3,500 THB for 12 hours. **If you are interested, [send me an email](#) and I can help you to arrange.**

Depart Chiang Rai at 3.30am so that you reach **Phu Chi Fa** early in the morning for sunrise. After a short hike you can watch the sunrise over the “Sea of Clouds.”

Continue to **Phi Chi Dao** lookout, followed by **Doi Patang** where you will see the Meekong River far down in the valley below. This river continues all the way to the Meekong Delta just south of Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam.

On the way back to Chiang Rai you can drop by **Phu Sang Waterfall** located just by the roadside for a quick swim or shower.

Arrive back in Chiang Rai by 3pm and take a rest.

- Night – on weekdays visit the Night Bazaar for food and drinks. On weekends visit the walkings streets as this is where all te action will be.

[Arrange a Driver](#)

Hotels in Chiang Rai

Chiang Rai may be a small town, but there is no shortage of quality hotels and resorts. Whether you want a budget guesthouse or a luxury hotel, there is a good option out there.

Budget

Mercy Hostel



Mercy Hostel is located right by the Chiang Rai Night Bazaar, just 500 meters from the centre of town. It is one of the closest hotels in to the town centre. There are 8-bed dorms and private rooms. Rooms have Wi-Fi and air conditioning. You will love the swimming pool and the pool table, a great place to meet other backpackers.

Stay here: [Mercy Hostel](#)

Fun-D Hostel



Fun-D Hostel is located just 700 meters from of the town centre nearby the King Mengrai Monument. There are private rooms, 6-bed dorms, and 8-bed dorms to choose from. Rooms have Wi-Fi and air conditioning. Watch out for the amazing beer specials and live music nights.

Stay here: [Fun-D Hostel](#)

Banlomnow



The Banlomnow Guesthouse is a nice colonial building located about 2km south of the town. There are private rooms with air conditioners, free Wi-Fi, and private bathrooms. The guesthouse is close enough to town to be walking distance (about 30 minutes) though it is a fair bit further out than Mercy Hostel.

Stay here: [Banlomnow Guesthouse](#)

Mid-Range and Luxury

The Riviere formerly



The Riviere Island Resort is located 2km from the centre of town alongside the Kok River (walking distance). The Riviere Island Resort overlooks the mountain ranges to the north, perhaps one of the nicest views in Chiang Rai.

Stay here: [The Riviere](#)

The Legend Chiang Rai



The Legend Chiang Rai is a super luxury style resort located right along the banks of the Kok River. If you want to splurge a bit on your trip, then look no further. Everything here is amazing; food, pool, views, rooms, and beds. You may only stay one or two nights here, but you won't forget them.

Stay here: [The Legend Chiang Rai](#)

Laluna Resort, Chiang Rai



Laluna Resort is a great mid-range hotel nearby the center of Chiang Rai. It is located within walking distance of the weekend walking street markets, 2km south of the city center. Laluna Resort has a great swimming pool and comfortable rooms. A great spot for your time spent in the city.

Stay here: [Laluna Resort](#)

A few finishing notes...

Thank you for purchasing my Chiang Rai Travel Guide! I hope you have found this guide useful in planning your trip to Chiang Rai. It is an amazing part of Thailand which I know you are going to love.

Many people travel to Chiang Rai for only one day. You might be able to squeeze in a few local attractions, but it just won't do this beautiful province the justice it deserves. I suggest spending at least three days in Chiang Rai. You won't regret it.

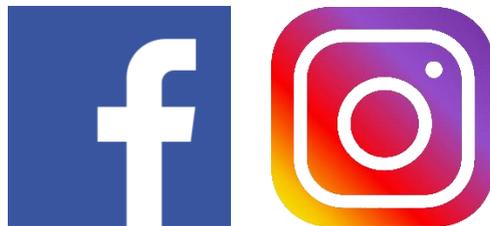
I am always publishing new travel articles, and updating my existing ones. Looking for more information on another destination in Thailand or abroad?

Make sure you visit the travel blog for all the latest travel tips:

www.thelostpassport.com

I also make regular updates about my latest travel tips, reviews, and post plenty of photos for travel inspiration on my social media channels.

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Cheers,

Josh Shephard

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