

“Jungles, Elephants & the Lantern Festival”

Thailand's Amazing Wonders - River Kwai to Chiang Mai

Oct 30 - Nov 8, 2025

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The best vacations are the ones with the most compelling stories to share. You'll be talking about this luxury 5-star getaway forever with the kaleidoscope of sights, sounds, flavors and playful experiences we packed into one trip. From Thailand's lush mountain jungles in the south to the colorful culture of the north, you'll discover three of this diverse country's most enticing regions.

We start by touring the golden temples in uber-cool Bangkok with our special AFS massage session and exclusive tuk-tuk parade! (There are so many new things to explore in the city that never sleeps; you may want to fly in a few days early to explore.)

Then, we head south to explore the wartime legacy area of Kanchanaburi on the scenic Thai Burma Railway. We walk the legendary Bridge over the River Kwai, made famous by the movie and take a ride on what became known as the infamous "Death Railway."



Enjoy bamboo rafting to waterfalls, caves and a visit to the Mon Tribal Village. Then channel your elephant whisperer at the ethical and world-renowned Elephant Nature Park for immersion with the ellies!

You'll love your "floating villas" at the breathtaking new Floathouse River Kwai resort, which is so unique that it looks surreal! This nature hideaway of rustic elegance floats on the water amid the lush green jungle. You'll see why it's called the "Pride of Thailand." Naturally luxurious, this hotel gives the word "glamping" a whole new dimension and you'll never forget it!

Fly to the lush Rose of the North to check into the exquisite award-winning Rati Lanna Riverside Resort & Spa in fabulous Chang Mai. We'll take in the best of this city with tours, but the highlight is the annual Loi Krathong or "Festival of Lights." The world-famous Lantern Festival overloads the senses and has exploded in popularity in the past few years. Revel in the celebration and our banquet at the temple of Yi Peng. Feel the spiritual energy as thousands of monks and locals send their prayers in Lotus baskets down the river, and countless paper lanterns are released into the sky during the full moon. All of Chiang Mai comes alive this week, and it's our rare privilege to get accommodation during this time this year.

You may have been to Thailand before, but we raised the bar with more adventure. We know Thailand well as it is our 13th AFS group to tour here. Everyone loves the Royal Kingdom of Thailand, known as the "Land of Smiles." TripAdvisor says it's the best country for the most bana

for your buck. We've made it so exceptionally affordable that you may want to add another Asian stop over at the trip's end.

It's the kind of vacation that dreams are made of. Come receive your blessing! The elephants never forget, and neither will you. Let the forever memories begin.



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Our Glorious AFS Itinerary

[Tap for printable itinerary](#)

October 29 or 30 – Depart USA

Fly to Bangkok. Check your flight bookings to insure that you arrive in Bangkok on October 31st,

when the land portion begins. Most flights will cross the international dateline so you may lose an entire day. Don't worry, you'll make it up on the way back.



31 October – Sawasdee...Welcome to The Lands of Smiles



We'll arrive in Bangkok and have a common group transfer to our hotel based flight arrivals to the deluxe Avani Riverside. Overlooking the Chao Phraya River, we'll enjoy a soothing retreat in the heart of a bustling city.

Well known as the City of Angels, Bangkok – known locally as Krungthepmahanakorn - is Thailand's spiritual, cultural, political, commercial, educational and diplomatic enter. It became the country's capital in 1782 under the first monarch of the present Chakri Dynasty. A vibrant city, there is an endless choice of sightseeing and entertainment opportunities. With numerous canal (klong) networks, the Chaophraya River, it's no wonder it is called the "Venice of the East."

This evening is free to revel in Bangkok's nightlife. Everyone loves the luxury rooftop bars and the Skytrain can whisk you anywhere.

Overnight: [Avani Riverside](#) (2 nights)





The Avani Riverside Bangkok Hotel offers a luxurious stay on the banks of the Chao Phraya River in Bangkok, Thailand. Boasting stunning views of the river and the city skyline, the hotel provides a serene escape from the bustling city life. Guests can enjoy modern and stylish accommodations, exceptional dining options, a rooftop infinity pool, and a spa for ultimate relaxation. With its convenient location near popular attractions and a unique riverside setting, the Avani Riverside Bangkok Hotel is the perfect choice for travelers looking to experience the best of Bangkok in style and comfort.



1 November – Bangkok Temple Tours & Tuk Tuks B D

After breakfast, we set out to explore Bangkok and its marvelous temples, starting in Chinatown, home to Thailand's largest Chinese community and the Stunning Wat Trimit. This is the world's largest massive gold seated Buddha, measuring nearly 16 and a half feet high and weighting five and a half tons. Once hidden from invading armies by a covering of stucco and plaster, the gold beneath was discovered by accident when it was accidentally dropped as it was moved.



Next is Wat Po, which was the first public university of Thailand and is the oldest and most extensive temple in Bangkok. It houses hundreds of chedis and the 3rd biggest colossal reclining Buddha in Thailand. The gigantic gold-plated reclining statue has inlaid mother-of-pearl soles of 108 good lucks and is highly revered among Buddhists. If we time it right, we should be able to witness monks' chanting in the main chapel.

which is not commonly seen by tourists. Since Wat Po is a school for traditional medicine and massage, we'll enjoy a Thai Foot massage.

We'll have our own special AFS Parade of Tuk Tuks as we make our way through Bangkok's old quarter, past the Grand Palace, the Giant Swing, Bangkok City Hall, Democracy Monument, and on to Rajadamnoen Avenue, with a final stop at Wat Benjamaborphit, commonly known as Marble Temple, built of Carrara marble from Italy. The cloister around the assembly hall houses 52 images of Buddha.



In the evening, we'll celebrate with a **Welcome Dinner** at the award-winning Cabbage & Condom Restaurant, considered one of the of the most unique Thai restaurants in Bangkok.

Overnight: Avani Riverside.

2 November - Kanchanaburi River Kwai with Train Ride B D

After an early breakfast, we depart for Kanchanaburi, located west of Bangkok. Sharing a border with Myanmar, Kanchanaburi province is known for its magnificent landscapes and stunning mountainous terrain, with tropical rain forests, wildlife sanctuaries, waterfalls and the famous River Kwai.

We'll visit the Cemetery of the Allied Prisoners of World War II, which contains graves of 6,982



Allied POWs who perished from starvation, overwork, disease or execution during the construction of the "Death Railway" under the control of the Japanese army. For maximum appreciation, be sure to stream some movies on the profound history here.

The Thailand-Burma Railway Centre helps contextualize the horrendous conditions under which the 250-mile-long railway was built. It originally ran from Baan Pong in Thailand to Thanbuyuzayat in Myanmar.

We'll then visit the famous Bridge over the River Kwai itself. Known internationally, thanks to both movies and books, the black iron bridge was brought from Java by the Japanese army and reassembled by the POWs. It was the frequent target of Allied bombing raids during 1945 and was rebuilt after the war ended.



We'll board a train for a scenic ride along the Kwai River on part of the historic Death Railway Route from Tha Kilen to Nam Tok Station. Before heading to the incredible FloatHouse Resort on the River Kwai, we'll enjoy lunch at a local restaurant. Loading the top of the scenic river Kwai, this unique Thai-style resort is surrounded by tropical forests and the mountains of Saiyoke. It's a magical experience to feel immersed in nature miles away from civilization here. Offering free Wi-Fi, it features private villas with a 32-inch flatscreen TV and private sun decks with daybeds.

Our afternoon is free to explore the gorgeous grounds, but we'll enjoy dinner tonight at the floating Pontoon Restaurant.

Overnight: [The FloatHouse River Kwai](#) (Floating Villa – 2 nights)



The Floating House River Kwai Floating Villas offer a unique and serene accommodation experience on the River Kwai in Thailand. Guests can stay in luxurious floating villas surrounded by the tranquil waters and lush greenery of the river. The villas are elegantly designed to blend harmoniously with the natural surroundings, providing a peaceful retreat. With modern amenities and breathtaking views, the Floating House River Kwai Floating Villas offer a one-of-a-kind stay for those seeking relaxation and serenity amidst nature.

3 November - Waterfalls & Villages - Kanchanaburi

B, L, D

After breakfast, we re-join our long-tailed boats to take us on an exciting boat ride upstream to **Saiyoke National Park**, it's a bucolic place of walking trails amid mixed forests of bamboo, evergreen and deciduous greenery. Then, visit the **Mon tribal village**, where the Mon people have lived for generations. Visit the Golden Rock, Buddha image cave and village school. (Please bring



some goodies for the kids.). Take a short walk on easy jungle trail along the River bank to get to the stunning viewpoint of River Kwai.

Lunch at local restaurant before visiting **Lawa Cave** and exploring the fascinating stalactite in the afternoon and there's a chance to spot Khun Kitti, the smallest bat in the world with a span-world of 10 cm and a weight of less than 2 gram. Dinner at your hotel.

Overnight: The FloatHouse River Kwai (Floating Villa – 2 nights). B, L, D

Discover Chiang Mai: The Rose of the North Beckons

Tucked away in a lush river basin, 700 kilometers north of bustling Bangkok, lies Chiang Mai - a city that seamlessly blends stunning natural beauty with a rich, unique cultural heritage. This enchanting metropolis, founded by the great King Mengrai in 1296, has blossomed into the heart of Northern Thailand, a hub of commerce, communication, culture, and tourism that beckons travelers from around the world.

Perched 310 meters above sea level, Chiang Mai is nestled within the embrace of majestic mountain ranges, its landscape a tapestry of vibrant jungles, rugged peaks, and fertile valleys. Much of this breathtaking terrain lies within protected national parks, teeming with an astonishing array of flora and fauna that await your discovery.



But Chiang Mai's allure extends far beyond its physical beauty. The city is a living museum of indigenous cultures, home to hill tribes who have preserved their traditional ways of life for centuries. Visit their villages, perched high in the mountains, and immerse yourself in a world that seems a lifetime away from the hustle and bustle of modern existence.

Whether you're an intrepid adventurer, a curious culture seeker, or simply a wanderer at heart, Chiang Mai, the Rose of the North, offers an unforgettable journey into Thailand's unspoiled wilderness and the soul of its people. Come, explore, and let this enchanting city forever capture your heart.

04 November – Fly to Chiang Mai, Rose of the North B

After breakfast, we travel back to Bangkok to catch an afternoon flight to Chiang Mai.

Known as the Rose of the North, Chiang Mai is blessed with stunning natural beauty of both jungles and mountains, it also enjoys a unique indigenous cultural identity. Founded by King Mengrai the Great in 1296 as the capital of the Lanna Thai Kingdom, today Chiang Mai is the economic, communications, cultural and tourism center of Northern Thailand.

Upon arrival at Chiang Mai International Airport, we'll be greeted by our local representative and transferred to our exquisite resort, the RatiLanna Riverside Spa Resort. Located on the banks of the Ping River, it is at the heart of the city's main attractions.

The rest of the day is ours to explore our new hotel and its vibrant surroundings.

Overnight: RatiLanna Riverside Spa Resort (4 nights)



At the RatiLanna Riverside Spa Resort, we invite you to experience a luxurious retreat nestled along the banks of the Mae Ping River. Our exquisite resort offers you a tranquil oasis with lush gardens, traditional Thai architecture, and panoramic views of the river. We feature elegantly appointed rooms and suites, a world-class spa offering rejuvenating treatments, and multiple dining options serving authentic Thai cuisine. You can unwind by our infinity pool, take a leisurely boat ride on the river, or explore the nearby attractions of Chiang Mai. With our serene ambiance and impeccable service, RatiLanna Riverside Spa Resort is the perfect destination for your relaxing and indulgent getaway.

05 November - Chiang Mai Tour & Festival B D

This morning we will visit the must-sees of Chiang Mai, starting with Wat Pra That Doi Suthep

This is Chiang Mai's most important and visible landmark, located near the summit of Doi Suthep, 3,520 feet above sea level and 9 miles from the town. After a drive up the mountain's winding road, the final climb to the site is via a magnificent Naga (dragon-headed serpent) staircase of 306 steps.

The climb is worth the effort! Inside is an intriguing copper-plated chedi topped by a five-tier gold umbrella which contains partial relics of Lord Buddha. If timing is good, we'll witness an impressive scene of monks and novice solemnly praying in the Viharn, a daily routine commonly experienced by all visiting the temple in the evening. Admire the stunning panorama over the city of Chiang Mai from the summit of Doi Suthep before leaving the temple.

We'll return to the hotel in the afternoon and enjoy some leisure time before we meet again for a sumptuous group dinner at the RatiLanna. We head down to the river to release our banana-leaf baskets with our wishes as a celebration of Loy Krathong Festival. It's a dream to see the countless lotus baskets lit with candles floating away to the goddess of water as fireworks like the sky.

Overnight: RatiLanna Riverside Spa Resort



6 November – World Famous Lantern Festival B D

After a sumptuous buffet breakfast of the freshest international cuisine's, we have the whole day free ahead of this evening's festivities for the Lantern Festival.

We'll gather around 5pm and head to the festival venue for our banquet dinner and festival show. A host of sights, sounds, and food await, including activities at CAD village such as floating lanterns on the water or Loi kratong.

We'll then enter the ritual area in front of the great pagoda and experience the drum and candle show as well as the religious ceremony with monks chanting. Then we all light our lanterns and launch them high into the sky. It's a brilliant display never to be forgotten.

We'll return to the hotel in late evening

Overnight: RatiLanna Riverside Spa Resort



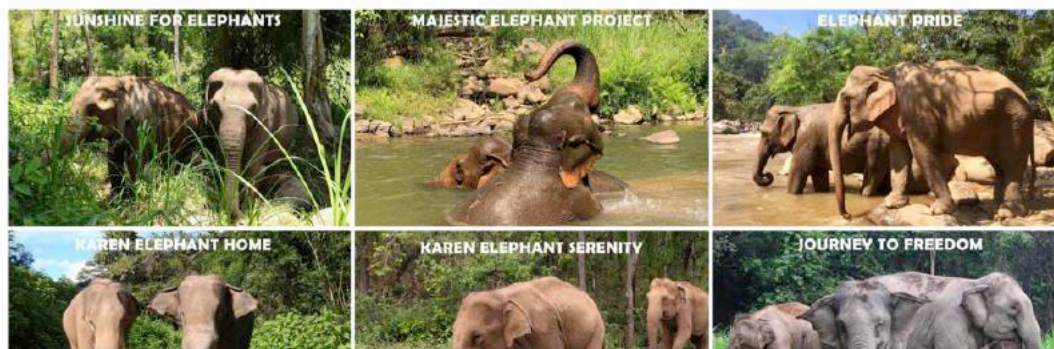
07 November - Elephant park and Leisure time B

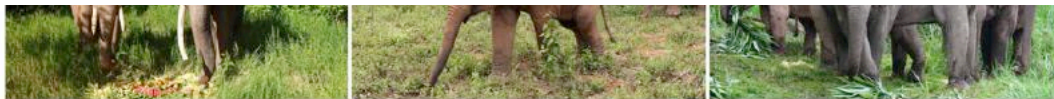
Morning - Half Day visit Elephant Conservation at Elephant Nature Park –

After breakfast, get picked up from your hotel in Chiang Mai city, and admire the views of beautiful mountains crossed by spectacular roads as you drive through picturesque countryside to the Elephant Nature Park, a sanctuary and rescue center for elephants in Mae Taeng District. On the way you will hear the personal stories of our rescued elephants as told by one of the park's expert

guides. You will also have a chance to see “Vanishing Giants”, the award-winning National Geographic documentary profiling the work Khun Lek is doing on behalf of Asian elephants in Thailand.

At the park you will have the opportunity to spend time with the various herds. Many of these elephants have left behind a traumatic past and for the first time are able to form relationships with other elephants and rediscover their elephant nature. One of the highlights is to hand fruit and vegetables to the elephants from the viewing platform and observe the incredible giants as they roam the park with their family groups and walk around the park in smaller groups. Expect great photos! Walk around the park with the elephants (no riding), and see the elephants socializing in their herds. After the guided walk, enjoy a sumptuous and varied vegetarian buffet of Asian and Western dishes. You can chat with your guide and the park volunteers during lunchtime, which is a nice way to learn even more about the elephants at the park. Occasionally the stories will be interrupted by the noises and interactions between the park's elephants. 1:30 we say goodbyes to the elephants and head an hour back to Chiang Mai. Note, ENP is voted as the most ethical elephant sanctuary in the world!





The afternoon is yours to explore the many attractions in and around Chang Mai. There are numerous other temples to visit, you can explore the famous Warorot Market or even take in a cooking class. You can get out in nature by visiting local waterfalls or go river rafting. In the evening, the Night Bazaar is a bustling showcase of local street foods and handcrafted souvenirs with live music.

Overnight: RatiLanna Riverside Spa Resort

08 November - Chiang Mai - Departure

Following breakfast, we'll head to the airport based on our individual schedules as it is time to bid Thailand goodbye or Lā kxn.

[REGISTER NOW](#)

LAND PRICE: \$3295 pp twin share plus \$110 internal domestic air.

Gratuities for licensed guides, drivers, and porters of \$95 will be added to the invoice for your convenience.

Single rooms are limited and cost an additional \$998

Includes:

- Accommodation as per above itinerary with daily breakfast included and meals as stated.
- Activities that are mentioned or specified in the itinerary with English-speaking guide service and entrance fees, tickets to lantern festivals, National licensed tour manager, AFS GTL

NOTE: Airfares are based on current rates and are subject to change without notice.

- Departure Tax is presently included in the domestic and international ticket prices.
- Accommodation & flights subject to availability. Breakfast is inclusive.
- Luggage allowance per person on any transfer is one large suitcase and one carry-on.

Have you read the Trip Tips yet? Scroll to the top of the page and click the link.

Itineraries are prepared up to a year ahead and things can change. Modifications may be made.

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