

Essential Thailand Bike Tour



Highlights

Vibrant cities, ancient ruins, colossal karst pillars and tropical jungles home to elephants and hill tribes – north Thailand is a region of rich culture and natural wonder. This 12-day epic bike tour covers all the best bits, from the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Ayutthaya and Sukhothai to the hilly borderlands of Thailand.

Discover the East on two wheels! Asia and the South Pacific are home to some truly incredible cycling routes, combining millennia-old cultural heritage with scenery of breathtaking majesty, from the mighty Himalaya to the volcanic isles of Polynesia! A cycling tour gives you the chance to explore these epic landscapes under your own steam; there are no trains to catch, no 4 am starts, no watching the sublime country pass you by from the back seat of a packed bus. Better still, a bike holiday allows you to interact with people and places in a much more intimate fashion than is possible on many tours, where you are forever surrounded by coachloads of other tourists in default travel mode: stop, snap, shop, split. On tours like these the main things are planned for you – hotels, routes, even the best time of year to travel – leaving you free to enjoy the awesome cycling!

This 12-day cycling tour gives you the chance to truly explore the beautiful lands of Thailand. From Bangkok you will take in Nakhon Sawan and the flat agricultural central plains of the north, dotted with villages and Buddhist temples. You will also discover the ancient, fabled Sukhothai. Further on and the flat plains start giving way to rolling hills and thick forests. You'll enjoy a free day in Chiang Mai, one of the original Thai Kingdoms, experience its vibrant night market and admire the handicrafts. The final leg of the trip winds its way through the dramatic karst outcroppings of the hill country north of Chiang Mai. Among the sights awaiting you are Thailand's ethnic tribes, still living their traditional ways. For a final memory of this experience of a lifetime you will ride alongside the Mae Kok River which flows out of China's highlands.

Is it for me?

This bike tour is aimed at intermediate to advanced level riders, but is definitely suitable for energetic beginners who put in some pre-trip training. You'll be covering a total of 703 km, averaging 87 km per day, so endurance is a must. There are climbs throughout.

The roads are well-paved and relatively quiet, meaning you don't have to worry about negotiating frenzied traffic or deciphering alien road signs. If for any reason you are struggling with the riding, you can get a lift in the back-up van at the beginning or end of the day, so there's no danger of you holding up the other riders. The daily itinerary is flexible and you can arrange a pace that suits the group.

Private tours can also be arranged for two to five people. Groups are normally made up of eight to twelve riders, but there may be more or less.

Accommodation

During this tour you will stay at several different boutique hotels and resorts, including the Chakungrao Riverview Hotel in Kamphaeng Phet, the Garden Suite Resort in Nakhon Sawan, the Legendha Sukhothai Resort in Sukhothai and the Bohdi Serene Hotel in Chiang Mai. All offer top quality accommodation in spectacular settings, with full en-suite bedrooms, lush gardens, swimming pools and sumptuous communal spaces as standard.

Prices from

1,602 GBP (12 days) per person

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Most of your meals are included on this tour; hotel restaurants serve both Thai and international cuisine and you can expect some excellent picnic lunches when you're on the road. You also have a free day in Chiang Mai, giving you the chance to get out and sample some Thai specialties, from road-side Pad Thai to pan-fried grasshoppers!

Itinerary

Day One: Bangkok - Nakhon Sawan

Your group will gather this morning at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, then drive north of the city to ancient Ayutthaya. You'll embark on a walking tour to explore some of the more significant ruins of this former capital city. After lunch, you continue north to the market town of Nakhon Sawan, your launching point for this cycling holiday. You can enjoy dinner at a floating restaurant followed by the launching of traditional khom loy (Thai Fire Balloons) for good luck.

Day Two: Nakhon Sawan - Kamphaeng Phet

The first bike tour of the trip travels through the flat farmlands of the Chao Phraya River Valley, with emerald green rice fields stretching as far as the eye can see, punctuated by vibrantly coloured temple complexes and wooden houses. You may have the opportunity to witness traditional agricultural methods such as duck powered pest control, sun drying of tapioca and peppers and wind winnowing of rice hulls. Your goal for the evening is Kamphaeng Phet, another of Thailand's ancient kingdoms, dating from the Sukhothai Era (500 to 700 years ago). You can then head out for dinner at the night market at a small, simple cafe with a fabulous chef. (Cycling 121 kms)

Day Three: Kamphaeng Phet - Sukhothai

In the morning your group will pedal the short way through town to Kamphaeng Phet Historical Park. This UNESCO World Heritage Site has a section of ruins within the city containing the Imperial Temple complex among others and a second section tucked away in the forests outside the city. You can enjoy a walking tour of the first and then take your bikes for a ride through the second. From Kamphaeng Phet it is a short, scenic ride through rural Thailand to your next stop at the renowned ruins of Sukhothai and your hotel sitting just outside the historical park. (Cycling - 85 kms)

Day Four: Sukhothai - Sawankalok

You start your day with a cycling trip through the Sukhothai Historical Park (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), where you can discover many fabulous ruins dating back some 500 to 700 years. The complex is an amazing tribute to the ancient kings and their visions. After lunch, roll on to the small town of Sawankalok, your stop for tonight. For dinner, your group will go "grazing" at the night food market, tasting an array of everyday Thai food, watching as the locals come to get their dinners (very few Thai's have full kitchens at home, preferring to buy their prepared dinners at the markets).

Day Five: Sawankalok - Lampang

You head north out of the agricultural regions and into the foothills of the northern mountains today. You will pass by Si Satchanalai National Park this morning, with the option to stop and explore a bit if you haven't tired of ancient ruins. Much of the day is quite flat, but does give way to hills as you approach the crossroads town of Thoen. At one point during the ride, it appears that massive mountains block your way, but as you approach, you come to discover that they are really flat slabs of granite turned up on edge and are only a 100 feet thick, yet towering way above your head. In mid-afternoon, your group will load up in support vans and drive to Lampang, bypassing a busy highway. (Cycling - 100 km)

Day Six: Lampang - Chiang Mai

Your last bike ride of the first week rolls through the rural countryside. You can visit the historic Wat Phra That Lampang Luang, with its fortress like appearance and viharns (temple buildings) dating back to the 15th century. In late afternoon, the group shuttle into Chiang Mai to avoid the afternoon rush hour traffic. Tonight you head out for a traditional northern Khan Toke dinner with classical Thai and hill tribe dancing. (Cycling - 90 km)

Day Seven: Chiang Mai

Today is a free day with a variety of things to do in Chiang Mai, from cycling tours of Wiang Kum Kam and visits to handicraft shops to cooking classes and more. Your guides will be glad to fill you in on the options and help you plan your day (lunch and dinner are taken independently today).

Day Eight: Chiang Mai - Baan Rai

The group heads north this morning, following small roads along the Mae Ping through villages and past flower farms. Lunch time will find you in the town of Mae Rim, where you will break from cycling to visit an orchid grower, butterfly farm and the Mae Rim Elephant camp, where you can watch a demonstration of the elephants' former work. In late afternoon, remount your bike for a beautiful ride through emerald rice paddies and past colourful temples en route to your overnight stop in the village of Baan Rai. (Cycling 50 km)

Day Nine: Baan Rai - Mae Malai - Wat Baan Den

Your morning ride takes you first to Mae Malai, where you can visit a traditional market featuring a broad selection of local vegetables, fruits and fish, along with a tasty array of prepared foods from pad se yu (noodles) to fried insects. You can also visit the magnificent Wat Baan Den, before heading north into the rolling, forested countryside. Your bike tour winds down the day at a picturesque resort tucked in amongst the impressive karst hills ... relax by the lake with a cold Singha beer or on the porch of your teak cottage hidden in the gardens. (Cycling - 92 km)

Day Ten: Wat Baan Den - Tha Ton

After breakfast this morning, the group will pedal up to a beautiful giant Buddha, perched beneath the golden cliffs, then enjoy a thrilling descent onto the agricultural realm around Fang. You will visit Tham Tub Tao, an ancient temple complex with hundreds of Buddha images inside a giant cavern. Each year a gathering of 2500

monks takes place at this temple and has been happening for hundreds of years. In the afternoon you can spend some time exploring Wat Mae Ai Luang, with its historic wooden temple featuring Burmese architecture, before rolling further north to Tha Ton, your overnight stopping point. (Cycling - 88 km)

Day Eleven: Tha Ton - Mae Khong

As the morning fog burns off, head out for a leisurely ride along the Mae Kok, watching as the villagers start their days in the fields. In late morning, you will load up in the sag and drive to a Kayan Village perched on the mountain top (avoiding a very steep climb). The Kayan, also known as 'long neck women' or 'Paudang', have a village cooperative that sells their handwoven products to visitors like ourselves. Re-mount your bikes in the afternoon and continue your ride to the historic ruins of Chiang Saen and your hotel near the Mae Khong. (Cycling 115 km)

Day Twelve: Mae Khong - Chiang Mai

Your cycling holiday comes to an end today. After breakfast you can visit the White Temple, a unique Buddhist site featuring incredible carvings by a Chiang Rai artist. Then you will be shuttled back to Chiang Mai, arriving in the early afternoon (guests can also be dropped off at Chiang Rai Airport). Khap khun khap, sawasdee khap!

Details

Getting there

Flying to Thailand...You will need to fly into Bangkok's International Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK). The airport is serviced by many major airlines, including Thai Airways, Bangkok Airways and British Airways. The tour will end at Chiang Mai International Airport (CNX). You will be dropped off here at around lunchtime on Day Twelve. It may be possible to be dropped off in Chang Mai if you are staying on after your trip.

Joining instructions... You will meet your group at Bangkok's International Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK) at 8 am on Day One of your tour. You may therefore wish to arrive the day before and have a night in Bangkok before you begin your adventure.

Price includes

Price quoted is for the scheduled departure trip. See the Dates & Prices box below.

All meals with soft drinks and beer (excluding one day in Chiang Mai), accommodation, van support, transfers, guide, sightseeing and cultural activities.

When is best

Private departures can be arranged pretty much year round. November through to March is the best time to come, when temperatures are warm and there is little rain. April and May are hot and sunny. June to October is the rainy season, with cooler temperatures and a chance of several days of rain.

Comfort level

Refined (boutique or luxury accommodation and food)

Experience required

Some previous experience is needed

Travellers should bring

A recommended kit list for the tour includes: your bike if you want to bring it, although good quality bikes are available for hire; a helmet; at least two waterbottles or a hydration pack; a rucksack for personal gear; a reasonable supply of spares such as inner tubes and any energy snacks you might want during your rides.