

# Cycling Tour of North Thailand



## Highlights

**This seven-day Northern Thailand tour brings you the best of this fascinating region; with hill tribes, elephants and ancient ruins, the jungles and mountains of Northern Thailand are a world away from the busy beaches of the south.**

This Northern Thailand tour gives you the chance to explore these epic landscapes under your own steam; there are no trains to catch, no 4am 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 peoples and places in a much more intimate fashion than is possible on many tours, where you're 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 seven-day cycling tour is a great introduction to the beauty and diversity of Thailand's less-travelled north. From Chiang Mai, the country's vibrant second city and a major cultural centre, you'll head through patchwork paddies deep into the jungle, where stilted tribal villages hide amongst the undergrowth. En route, visit a butterfly farm, an orchid grower and the famous Mae Rim Elephant camp, as well as the ancient cave Buddhas of Tham Tub Tao and the wooden temples in Mae Ai! Each day of the tour is action packed, but rest assured there's still plenty of time to kick back – the hot springs of Doi Pha Hom Pok National Park are the perfect place to unwind at the end of the hard day in the saddle, and nothing beats a cold Singha beer on the deck of your own private jungle cottage. No wonder they call it the Land of Smiles!

## Is it for me?

These guided cycling holidays are fantastic tours featuring many of north Thailand's 'hidden treasures'. As such, we'd recommend this to absolutely everyone, so long as they have some cycling experience and are in fairly good shape. You won't be covering any mammoth distances – the daily average is about 61 km – and there only a few steep hills to tackle. If for any reason you are struggling with the riding, you can always get a lift in the back-up van (which also carries your luggage on hotel to hotel routes) at either the beginning or end of the day, so there's no danger of you holding up the other riders. The daily itinerary is in fact very flexible – you can see what you want to see at a pace that suits you – which means early starts can be avoided if you need your full eight hours!

The entire ride is on paved roads, most with nice pavement and wide shoulders. Traffic is moderate to light and very bike friendly. The route is suitable for performance road, sport road and touring bikes. Terrain is a mix flat, with some moderate hills midway through the route and at the finish point.

The group sizes vary, but you can expect to be in a group of around 8 - 12 people, with a maximum of 16 riders. English is the main language spoken on the trips, but you can expect your fellow cyclists to come from all over the world.

If you are a solo traveller, you will be paired up with another single traveller of the same sex who you will share a room with. If you do not want to share, or there are no other solo participants, you will be charged a single supplement.

## Accommodation

On this Northern Thailand tour you'll be staying at luxury boutique hotels and resorts throughout northern Thailand, including the Bohdi Serene Hotel in Chiang Mai, the Baan Rai Lanna in Baan Mae Malai, the Marisa

Prices from

**949** GBP (7 days) per person

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Resort in Chiang Dao and the Mae Kok River Village in Tha Ton. All offer top quality en suite accommodation in a spectacular setting, with lush gardens, innovatively-shaped swimming pools and sumptuous communal spaces as standard. All of your meals are included on this tour (plus soft drinks and beer); the hotel restaurants serve both Thai and international cuisine and you can expect some excellent picnic lunches when you're on the road. And seeing as you'll be in Chiang Mai for two nights you'll have ample opportunity to get out and sample some Thai specialties, from road-side Pad Thai to pan-fried grasshoppers!

## Itinerary

### Day 1 Chiang Mai - Lodge

Your bike tour group will gather today in the vibrant northern city of Chiang Mai. After checking into your lodge you'll get set up with a bike before heading out for a traditional northern Khan Toke dinner with classical and hill tribe dancing.

### Day 2: Wiang Kum Kam

This morning you head south of town to explore the ruins of Wiang Kum Kam, site of the first city built by King Mengrai some 700 years ago. Unfortunately his choice of land was subject to frequent floods, so after a short while he moved the city to its current locale. In the afternoon you'll wind your way back into the town, exploring the old town area with its historic Wats (temples) and ancient fortifications. Tonight you enjoy dinner at our favorite restaurant perched on the banks of the Mae Ping (Ping River), which flows through the heart of the city. (Cycling - 35 km)

### Day 3: Mae Ping River - Mae Rim - Baan Rai

You head 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'll break from cycling to visit an orchid grower, butterfly farm and the Mae Rim Elephant camp, where you'll enjoy a demonstration of the elephant's former work. Come late afternoon you remount your bikes for a beautiful ride through emerald rice paddies and past colorful temples en route to your overnight stop in the village of Baan Rai. (Cycling - 50 km)

### Day 4: Mae Malai - Wat Baan Den

Your morning ride takes you first to Mae Malai, where you'll 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 will also visit the magnificent Wat Baan Den before heading north into the rolling, forested countryside. You finish 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 trees. (Cycling - 92 km)

### Day 5: Tham Tub Tao - Doi Pha Hom Pok National Park

After breakfast this morning, you will pedal up to a beautiful giant Buddha perched beneath the golden cliffs, then enjoy a thrilling descent to the agricultural lands around Fang. You will also visit Tham Tub Tao, an ancient temple complex with hundreds of Buddha images inside a giant cavern. Each year a gathering of 2,500 monks takes place at this temple as has been happening for centuries. In the afternoon you arrive at Doi Pha Hom Pok National Park, Thailand's answer to Yellowstone with geysers and hot springs. Your bungalows overlook the geyser field and you can enjoy soaks in pools fed by natural hot springs. (Cycling - 63 km)

### Day 6: Mae Ai - Tha Ton

Your first stop is Mae Ai, where you will spend some time exploring Wat Mae Ai Luang, with its historic wooden temple featuring Burmese architecture. It's then on to Tha Ton, your overnight stopping point. After lunch beside the river, you will set out on a beautiful ride along the Mae Kok through farmlands and forests, culminating in a climb to Baan Yapa, a Padaung Village. The Padaung are also known as "Long Neck Women"; you have the opportunity to watch them create their traditional woven scarves. Your last night's celebratory dinner will be at a great restaurant overlooking the Mae Kok River. (Cycling - 64 km)

### Day 7: Chiang Mai

Your cycling holiday must come to an end today. You'll be shuttled back to Chiang Mai Airport in the van, one last chance to enjoy the landscape through which you cycled for the last few days. Khap khun khap, sawasdee khap.

## Details

### Getting there

You will be met from Chiang Mai Airport - you should aim to arrive between 1pm and 5pm

### Price includes

Price quoted is for the scheduled departure trip. For groups of 6 or more price is £1100 / \$1659.

All meals with soft drinks and beer, accommodation, van support, transfers, guide, sightseeing and cultural activities.

Bikes can be hired for \$130

Flights not included.

### When is best

You can expect the weather to be sunny and dry, around 26C in the day and 16C at night, with little rain between October and February.

### Comfort level

Refined (boutique or luxury accommodation and food)

## Experience required

Some previous experience is needed

## Travellers should bring

Helmets and water bottles

## Reviews (1)

### Reviews of this experience

“ Chiang Mai Thailand –The lush green farm fields of northern Thailand are beautifully framed by the jagged Chang Dao mountains as we spin through northern Thailand on a seven-day cycling trek. People call out "Sa wa dee kha!" ("Hello!") as we pedal by. The many glittering Buddhist temples (wats) are awe-inspiring, but even more important: The food is mind-blowing. Together, we ride from the city of Chiang Mai, a cool enclave of art and culture, to the northern border that Thailand shares with Myanmar.

Pedalling at 25 km/h (on flat terrain), I can stare into the hills in the distance, eyeball the cows grazing by the side of the road or wave back at the kid sitting on the back of a motorbike who squirms around to laugh and greet the silly tourist on a bike. Going downhill is another matter: reaching speeds upward of 40 km/h scares the hell out of me. At every sharp curve, a blast of cool mountain air, chilly as air conditioning, shocks me into giddy excitement. It's a thrill you can't get from walking or being shut in a car.

Lunch is always a stop at a roadside noodle shop. At first, eating is just the fuel for our pedalling, but with each passing meal, invariably delicious, cycling becomes just the means to the end of having more food. Khao soy, a northern specialty, is egg noodles in a soupy, lightly curried sauce with chicken. Green papaya salad, in its native land, is a revelation, salty and fishy, with bits of crab, crushed peanuts and fragrant herbs. Plates of food leave me reeling with their complex flavours, while Thai snacks are about simple pleasures. Steamed sticky rice and coconut milk is a favourite, whether it comes wrapped in a banana leaf pocket, or stuffed into a rod of bamboo the length of my forearm. Every morsel is swoon-worthy, and the range of food so vast that I forego any Fear Factor bravado and pass on the fried insects and other unfamiliar delicacies available at every market.

By the end of our trip, we have visited temples with grandeur that rivals any European cathedral. We've stayed in luxurious resorts, passed through an elephant conservation centre and marvelled at the traditional dances of hill tribes in the border region of the north.

The whole trip was done at the right pace, the tempo over the 150-kilometre journey set by our pumping legs and growing appetites.  
(Hannah Sung, writing for the Toronto Star, March 2010) ”

Toronto-Star reviewing Cycling Tour of North Thailand