

Hill Tribe Trekking in Thailand



Highlights

Hill Tribe Trekking in Thailand is on a lot of travellers' hit lists, but this one is just a little bit special. During your stay, you will learn the customs of Thailand's hill tribes, ride elephants along forest trails, talk with village shamans and spend the nights in rustic comfort in lodges built from the forest in traditional style. Rafting, mountain biking, and learning to cook hill-tribe style are all part of this trek overflowing with a lifetime's experiences.

About half a million of Thailand's population are members of small, culturally and often ethnically distinct tribes, mainly living in the mountainous Northern area of the country near the Burmese border. The incredible diversity of these peoples' ways of living, their beliefs and traditions, and - most immediately noticeable to even the most casual traveller - their dress, conspire with the extraordinary natural beauty of the region to produce a place of unrivalled density and richness. This is superbly rewarding country for the trekker; a journey replete with unforgettable destinations.

There is too much on offer on this trip to do more than give a cursory overview here; plenty of hiking, of course, and guided mountain biking too, but then there's also the inflatable river rafting, and the elephant ride through stunning jungle... And that's just the transport! You'll visit five major hill tribes in the region, both in village settings and at the lodges where you'll stay overnight, each of which is run by members of a different tribe. You'll have the chance to learn about herbs from the villagers, and to speak with the local shamans about their beliefs. You'll be given cooking lessons, Lanna Tribe style, and find out about how rice is farmed and the importance of bee conservation in the area. You can learn to carve fruit and vegetables or relax and enjoy a herbal steam bath or massage. There's just not enough space on this page for a complete itinerary!

Is it for me?

This tour definitely isn't for the lazy. You'll be walking or cycling every day for several hours, so you should have a reasonable level of fitness and positively enjoy physical activity and getting involved: the evenings and nights are for relaxing, but on this tour, the days are definitely for making the most of! Those who are interested in learning firsthand about the customs and crafts of the hill-tribes in the area will be well rewarded by the experiences on offer here, as will anyone who likes to sit back at the end of a day with a gentle ache in the legs and a satisfied smile. Families with children should bear in mind the amount of activity involved when considering this trip.

Accommodation

Lisu Lodge, 50 km north of Chiang Mai, is owned and run by members of the Lisu hilltribe. It is built in traditional style, as separate pavilions with bamboo walls and floors and thatched roofs. There are 24 double rooms, all with electricity, fans, bedding and mosquito nets, and all with ensuite bathrooms with hot water.

Lahu Outpost and Akha Outpost are both built according to the pattern of the houses of their namesake tribes, on village land. They provide mattresses, bedding, mosquito nets and towels. Outposts in the true sense of the word, they have no electricity but do have gas hot water: simple, but comfortable.

Khum Lanna consists of two traditional teak houses, with polished floors, fans and dressing tables in every room. All rooms have en-suite bathrooms with hot water, and the lodge has its own garden, verandah and open common space, and boasts beautiful mountain views

Prices from

350 GBP (5 days) per person

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Food is traditional Thai prepared for you in the distinctive styles of the different hill tribes you will visit. At Akha Outpost, you will help your guide in preparing the evening meal, while at Khum Lanna your two cooking lessons will culminate in you preparing your own sumptuous meal from ingredients collected from the garden and farms surrounding the lodge. Packed lunches are provided on longer trips.

Itinerary

Day 1: Lisu Lodge

After arriving at Lisu Lodge, you'll walk to the remote village of Hmong Pha Mieng, then enjoy a picnic lunch in the forest. After lunch, you'll walk to the mountaintop villages of Pha Daeng and Kup Kap, then dine and stay overnight at Lahu Outpost.

Day 2: Elephant Camp / Raft Trip / Shaman Visit

Breakfast at the Outpost, then walk 2 hours downhill past Huay Sadarn Waterfall to the river where you'll take a 45-minute inflatable raft trip to a traditional Thai country village, followed by a short transfer to the Elephant Camp for a picnic lunch, after which you'll enjoy an hour of elephant riding through beautiful mountainous jungle before a short drive to an Akha village to meet the shaman. From there, you'll be transferred back to Lisu Lodge. Guided by a Lisu villager, you'll walk from Ton Lung temple to visit the herbal garden, then continue through the village with a stop at the village shaman's house and visit the cultural center and created by the villagers. In the evening, you'll be served a Thai dinner with a traditional Lisu dance show, and stay overnight at Lisu Lodge.

Day 3: Akha Outpost

After breakfast at the Lodge, you can choose from a variety of one-hour activities. You'll then leave Lisu Lodge and head to a Palong village in Chiang Dao. A tasty picnic lunch will be provided en route. You'll walk uphill about 3 hours to Akha Outpost, set in an isolated area with spectacular views. For dinner, you'll help your guide whip up a tasty, wholesome mountain meal. Overnight at the outpost.

Day 4: Khum Lanna

Breakfast at Akha Outpost, then begin a downhill walk passing by the waterfall to another Akha village to take the short drive to Khum Lanna. Enjoy preparation for Lanna BBQ lunch with a garden tour around the compound, collecting different seasonal herbs, vegetables, and fruits for cooking. Enjoy a satisfying Thai lunch at Khum Lanna. In the afternoon, there will be a choice of structured one-hour activities. Late afternoon is lazy time until the second Thai cooking class in the early evening. Enjoy the fruits of your labours with a full 4-course sit-down Thai dinner with your host and friends. Stargazing around a campfire in the garden. Overnight at Khum Lanna.

Day 5: By bike around Khum Lanna

The day starts with a sunrise bike ride to Phrao to visit a market where local coffee is available, after which you'll return to Khum Lanna along the canal. You'll enjoy a Lanna-style breakfast on the riverside in preparation for the ride to the ancient city of Wiang Phrao Wung Hin, stopping en route to see the incredible accumulation of beehives on the sacred tree at Ban Nam Phrae. You'll cycle on to Wat Tham Dork Kum to visit different Buddha figures, including a huge reclining Buddha. Picnic lunch will be provided on the top of the mountain, which has a fantastic overview of the entire Phrao valley, after which you'll cycle back to Khum Lanna for refreshment and check-out.

Details

Getting there

You need to get to Chiang Mai. Direct flights are available to Bangkok from most major UK airports, then you can make your way to Chiang Mai, by bus, plane or train. Transfers to Lisu Lodge are available from either airport or hotels.

Price includes

Tour and activities: elephant riding (1 elephant = 2 person), rafting (1 rubber boat = 4-5 persons) and biking; your choice of one activity at Lisu: biking or oxcart or steam bath or massage; your choice of one activity at Khum Lanna: biking or carving or steam bath or massage; English-speaking guide; accommodation in non air-conditioned room at Lahu Outpost & Akha Outpost and non air-conditioned room with electric fan at Lisu Lodge & Khum Lanna, meals as specified in the itinerary; local coffee at the market; baggage handling; local open-air truck for the activity.

Not included

Transfers between Chiang Mai and Lisu Lodge / Khum Lanna - these can be arranged and cost around £7 to go by local truck or £28 to go by private car; any airfares; other meals than those specified in the itinerary.

You may also like to budget for optional expenses, such as purchases at the local market, alms giving, drinks and for telephone or laundry services.

Price details

Price quoted is price per person in the low season.

High Season:

1 Nov 2010 - 31 March 2011

17,460 Baht per person based on two people sharing

2,520 Baht single supplement

Low Season:

1 April 2011 - 31 Oct 2011

16,580 Baht per person based on two people sharing

2,270 Baht single supplement

Half-price for children aged between 2 and 12 (recommended minimum age 10).

Free for infants under 2.

Available

Jan—Dec

Typical Duration

5 days

Comfort level

Reasonably comfortable (Inns, B&Bs, luxury camping etc.)

Experience required

Some previous experience is needed

Reviews (2)

Reviews of this experience

“ We just got back from our trip and it was wonderful...It's really hard to adjust back to real life!

We had a great trip and the trek was wonderful. Jatoo, our guide, was an extraordinary guy, his English was very good, he knew the area very well, he told us a lot about Thailand and he was a riot over all! I think he made a big difference to our experience.

I'd rate the overall experience at 4. I think it'd be helpful to be a little more detailed in the requirement up front, as we thought the trek was walking around the forest but it was a bit more than that. We thoroughly enjoyed the challenge, so the last day, the bike ride fell a little short of expectations, we woke up really early and wished that we did a bit more at the end. I'd certainly recommend it to my friends and we'll look at other tours that you arrange in the future. ”

OyaEcevitt reviewing Hill Tribe Trekking in Thailand

“ .The trekking experience was great (i.e. day 1 and 2) would rate that a 5, Day 3 was a 4, Day 4 was a 3. Some elements of the trip such as the dancers at Lisu lodge was not really necessary as we prefer to see the Lisu tribe in their village rather than a forced dance in the lodge. Also, the bike trip on day 4 was too short. I think you should look at extending this trip and rearranging some of the other activities.

Having said these, I must point out that we had an excellent tour guide (Jatoo). I would recommend him to all my friends. He was very knowledgeable, and never got tired of our detailed questions.

Overall my main disappointment was that apart from the Lahu Outpost, the "rules" did not allow Jatoo to have dinner with us. I find this very strange at this day and age. This decision should be left to the guide and the visitors, not the owners of the lodges.

Hope these comments help. We had a wonderful time and saw the best part of Thailand. Thanks for your help. ”

OzgaUste reviewing Hill Tribe Trekking in Thailand