

CHIANG MAI TRAVEL GUIDE – THAILAND’S JUNGLE



My husband and I visited Chiang Mai as the second stop of our one week Thailand trip. Lots of friends had told me how much they loved it, so we were really excited! Though I do think Chiang Mai is a must stop on any Thailand trip, I was not as obsessed with it. **Krabi** was for sure my favourite part of my whole Thailand trip. If **Bangkok** is the food capital and Krabi is the beauty capital, Chiang Mai is the nature capital. So I absolutely loved the time that we spent outside the city and in nature, and you probably will too! My favorite part for sure was hiking up to the hidden temple in the mountain and doing a local yoga class. Read more about it below!

SHOULD I VISIT CHIANG MAI?

Chiang Mai has all the Thailand feels. Temples, elephants, mountains, markets, tuk tuks, jungles. It's the perfect spot to find everything. Because of this, it is also very popular and very crowded! Chiang Mai is swarming with tourists, specifically backpackers. I was happy to have visited Chiang Mai, but I am not dying to go back. You should go though if this is your first Southeast Asia or Thailand trip – for sure. Chiang Mai is also such a mix of hippie with the backpackers and yoga classes and trend with the hip neighborhoods and trendy restaurants and bars. You can make Chiang Mai what you want.

If you are deciding between different areas of Thailand, please **look at my Thailand Travel Guide** for a breakdown of each place.

WHAT TIME OF YEAR SHOULD I VISIT CHIANG MAI?

I would like to think that Chiang Mai is seeable year round? The interwebs say October – April. If you are trying to pair it with some beaches, **like Krabi**, I mention in that guide that the best time of year is January – March for the best weather.

HOW DO I GET TO CHIANG MAI?

You will most likely be flying into Chiang Mai. We had looked at train options but they are like 10+ hours from Bangkok and we didn't have the luxury of time. Our flight was also very inexpensive.

Check flights on Google Flights

To get a cab when you land, go to a taxi coupon booth and tell them where you are going. They will give you a two-part receipt and tell you where to exit to find your driver. It is only a short distance to most hotels and a flat fee of usually 150 Baht.

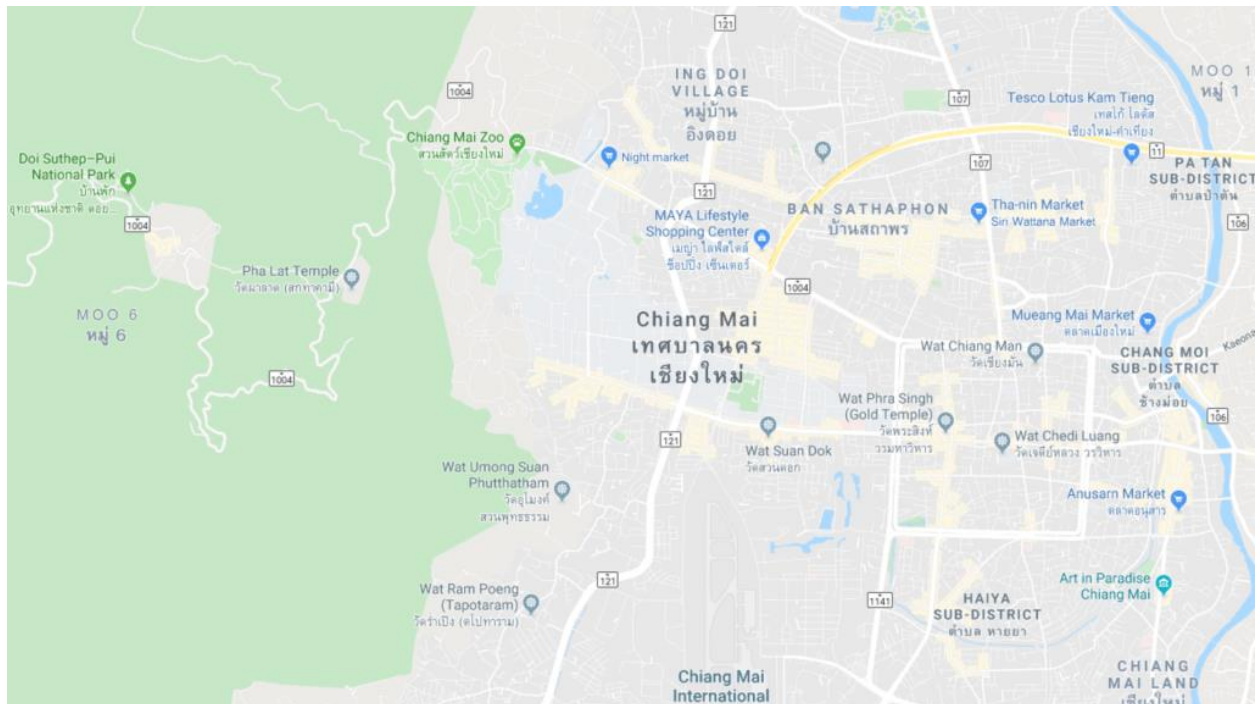
IS THERE A LANGUAGE BARRIER IN CHIANG MAI?

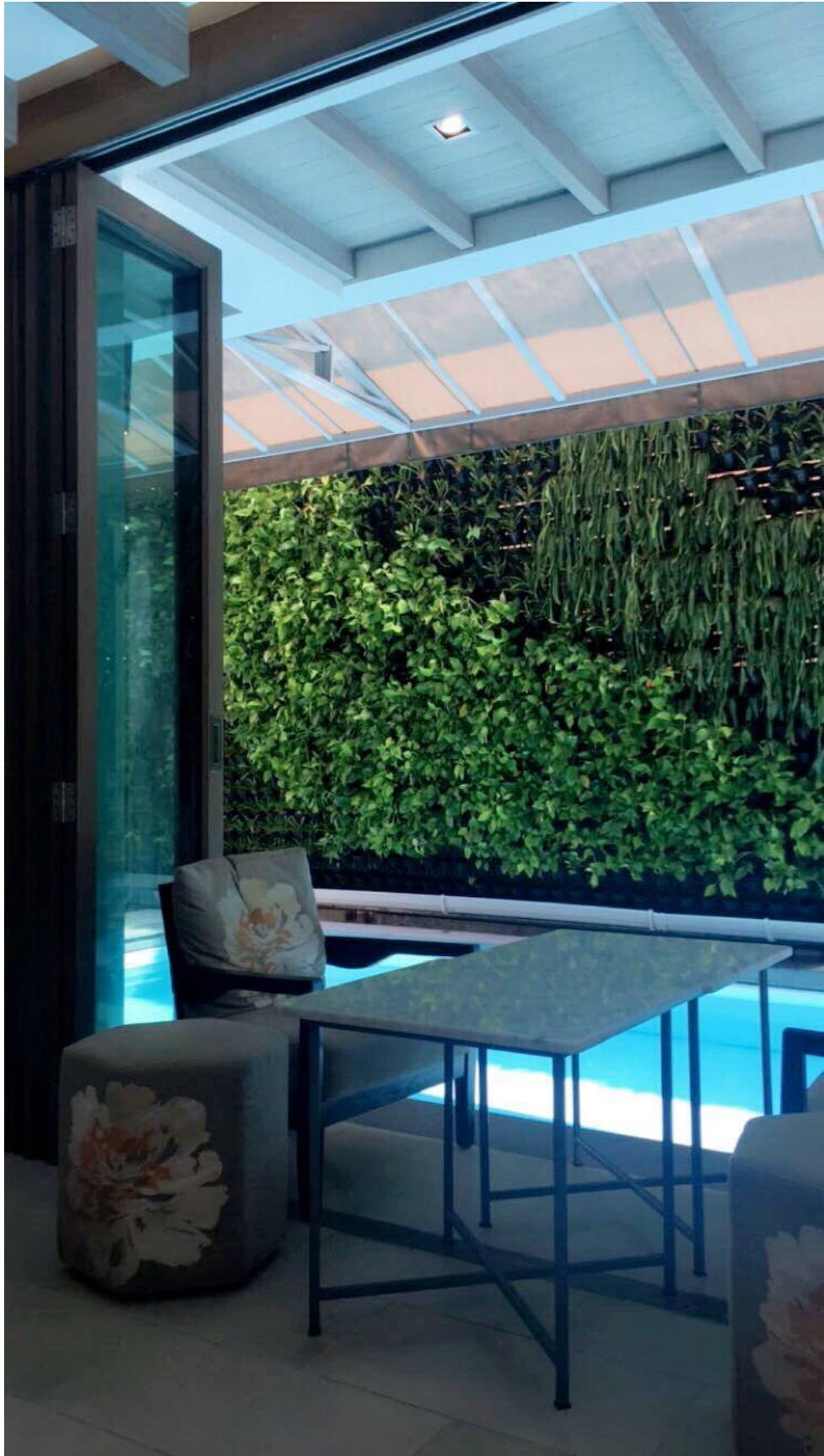
There was not a language barrier here as it is so touristy. We did have a slight "cultural" barrier in having no idea how to hail or use a songthaew to get around. These are usually the cheapest transportation method. More on that below.

WHERE SHOULD I STAY IN CHIANG MAI?

We stayed in a little boutique hotel, Kate and Hasu Boutique Hotel, and loved it – especially free breakfast by the beautiful pool! The main area where everyone stays is in the Old City (the square on google maps), but I found it to be too run down. The cutest area we saw was called Nimman and I wish we had stayed there because it was super trendy and fun. We stayed on the east side of the city and *loved* our hotel, but there just wasn't much around. I know there are 2 or 3 super nice resorts in town, and a few outside of town that I had seen some luxury travelers staying at. #notaluxurytravelerblogger Once again, use Tripadvisor and just get whatever is in your budget but I would suggest near the Old City or in Nimman.

Use TripAdvisor to find your hotel





HOW DO I GET AROUND CHIANG MAI?

Here you do not have public transportation, but you do have taxis and tuktuks along with these red trucks called songthaews. We could not figure out how to flag a songthaew down and what the process was so good luck. It's basically like a pickup truck where the flatbed has 2 benches facing each other. We mainly walked everywhere here and used tuk tuks when our feet were giving out.

Tip: make sure and ask the tuk tuk driver what the cost will be to get to your destination before you get in. They try and upsell tourists. After asking a few, you should have an idea for what a reasonable rate is.

HOW MANY DAYS SHOULD I SPEND IN CHIANG MAI?

I would say 2 full days. We only had 1 full day, and it wasn't enough. This is especially true if you are planning an activity – like elephants or cooking classes – as these take up the full day.

WHAT IS THERE TO DO IN CHIANG MAI?

WALK THE STREETS

This was my favorite thing – walking around the Old City and Nimman.

The Old City has cool temples all over the place – here is a **free self-guided walking tour** that I looked through beforehand. We went into Wat Phra Singh and really enjoyed it! I think we got in for free and I didn't have long pants on either... whoops (it looks like normal entrance fee is 20 Baht)! We did not go into Wat Chedi Luang because we didn't have time and it wasn't free (40 Baht), but the gates were beautiful.





Nimman is just so trendy and fun. We stumbled upon some really cute markets with actual good quality items. If you look up Dom Cafe, the square right outside is where the market was. There was also a really cool street market across the way on Nimmana Haeminda Rd Lane 1.

Iberrry Garden (ice cream) and Gallery Seescape (cafe) were two very instagrammable spots in Nimman where lots of trendy locals hung out. If you walk around the two streets these were on, you'll see lots of cool spots. **Nimman House Thai Massage** was a highly rated massage spot, but it was all booked up so make a reservation ahead of time if you are interested!





ELEPHANTS AND TIGERS

We did not end up doing the elephants because a) a lot of what you read says it's inhumane and b) it takes up a whole day and we only had 1 day in the city. If we had 2 days, I would have done a humane one that doesn't let you ride the elephants... maybe. The Tiger Kingdom thing is pretty inhumane too, but seriously if you want to do it just do it!! That's just personal love of animals stuff but my friends did both elephants and tigers.

[Here's an article about the ethics of elephants in Asia.](#)

COOKING CLASS

A lot of people did this, including us, but it wasn't super fun to me. Maybe because I cook all the time, but it was a little slow. We went to a market to pick our ingredients (this part I loved), got to pick our meals to make, and got a cookbook to take home. If you want to do one, look at Tripadvisor!

[Look at TripAdvisor cooking class tours](#)



WAT PHA LAT

My favorite thing we did pretty much the whole trip was hiking the “Monk’s Trail” to Wat Pha Lat. There is a mountain to the west of the city with a temple at the very top called Wat Doi Suthep. You can get there via songthaew (google how to do this, you have to taxi to Chiang Mai Zoo or Nimman and get one from there I think). Halfway up the mountain is an almost empty temple called Wat Pha Lat.

You can totally songthaew up to Wat Pha Lat too, but we chose to do a mild, hour or so long hike to get there. The hike is called the Monk’s Trail because the monks used to hike the exact trail to get to the Wats. They no longer do as we saw songthaews packed with monks headed to the temples – that made me giggle. When you do get there, the temple is truly so peaceful and remote. There were maybe 10 people there with us rather than the probable 100s at Wat Doi Suthep. There is also no entrance fee. I loved it!! I would definitely at least stop at this temple if you go to Wat Doi Suthep to get a dose of tranquility.

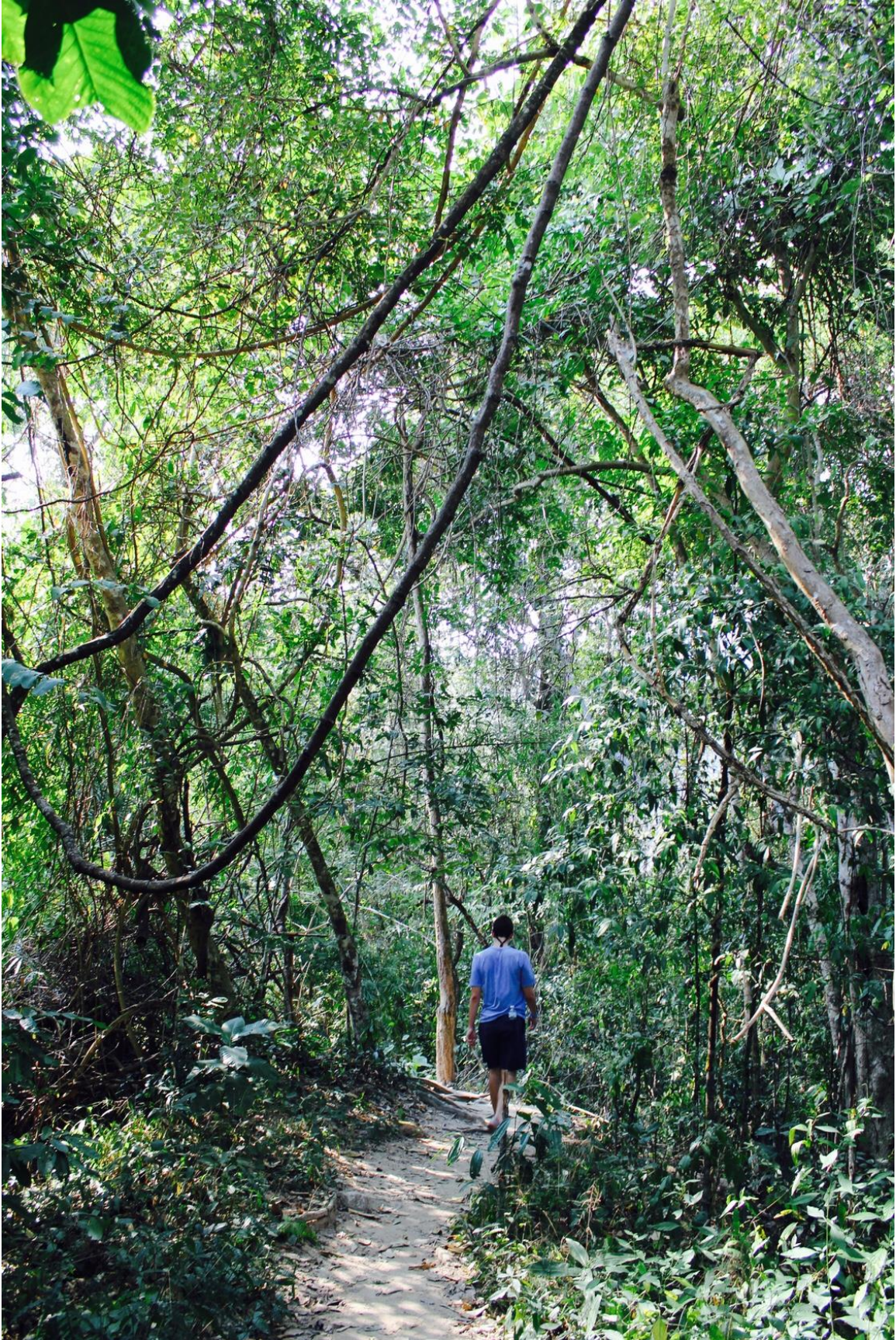
Use this link if you want to hike. We got dropped off by a taxi at the base of the mountain but it was very confusing to get to. Google Maps has a Wat Pha Lat hike marker now – but I can’t confirm that is the right spot. Someone check it out and report back! During the hike, you follow the orange strips of cloth tied to the trees up the mountain.

If you did skip Bangkok, I think Wat Doi Suthep would be a fun temple to visit, but we had gotten our dose of crowded temples in Bangkok!











NIGHT BAZAAR

I found this to be pretty touristy with cheap products, but it was something to do one night.

YOGA

We did a yoga class at **Blue Garden** one morning and it was so fun if you like yoga. There were plenty of mats to borrow. I also heard **The Yoga Tree** is great if you are closer to it.

WHERE DO I EAT IN CHIANG MAI?

BREAKFAST

Our hotel had free breakfast. There are plenty of smoothie places around and lots of cute brunch spots.

LUNCH AND DINNER

You just **HAVE** to eat Khao Soi at some point while you are there. It is a Northern Thailand dish that is a mix of curry and soup and is my favorite thing ever. We crave it all the time and I've actually made it using my cooking class cookbook back in Texas! If you don't like spicy food just tell them (this is true in any city). We ate Khao Soi at a super legit hole in the wall place in the middle of nowhere called Khao Soi Islam. It's a little sketch but delicious.



Cheng Doi Roast Chicken has the best chicken I've ever had in my life. It's in the Nimman neighborhood and is super hole in the wall too. It's super crispy-skinned chicken with a tamarind dipping sauce. It was maybe my favorite bite of the whole trip.



Dash is a great restaurant to go to for dinner. It is a little bit touristy but a really fun atmosphere. It's a bit upscale which is a nice change from the grunge of the city.

IS THERE A PLACE TO GO OUT IN CHIANG MAI?

Not that I pursued. Thailand has some unfortunately well-known sex shows. If you're into that – I have no experience so check out another blog!

WHAT SHOULD I PACK FOR CHIANG MAI?

The first day I knew we were going to a temple and on a hike so I wore loose athletic pants with a v-neck and tennis shoes. The second day I wore cotton shorts, a cotton top, and sandals for our cooking class. We actually ended up going into a temple too and nobody stopped me for not having my knees covered!

A lot of people like to do the elephant thing in Chiang Mai so if you do that, make sure and pack accordingly because I think you usually get pretty wet bathing/riding them in the water.

MY PERFECT 3 TO 4 DAY ITINERARY FOR CHIANG MAI

DAY 1

Get in a little early to Chiang Mai and seek out the Wat Pha Lat monk's trail hike. Hike up to Wat Pha Lat and enjoy the tranquility!! It's truly so special. Decide if you want to brave Wat Doi Suthep. On the way back, walk around the Nimman neighborhood and enjoy a Cherg Doi Roast Chicken stop.

DAY 2

Do an activity!! Either something ethical observing elephants, a cooking class, or something else entirely! In the later half of the day, if you have time, go explore the old city and stop at Wat Phra Singh.

DAY 3 (OPTIONAL EXTRA FULL DAY)

Do the hike if you haven't done it, or a second activity today. If you don't do the hike, a morning yoga class could be perfect. Maybe make it a self-care day all together and go get a massage at Nimman House Thai Massage as well. If you're staying at Kate and Hasu Boutique Hotel, there's a super cute pool to lounge in.

DAY 4

Morning yoga if you have time, and put the door to your next Thailand stop. May I recommend Krabi?

HONESTLY, HOW MUCH DID YOU SPEND IN CHIANG MAI?

TOTAL FOR 2 NIGHTS = \$191

Flight from Bangkok = \$64

Hotel = \$55

Transportation = \$10

Cooking Class = \$25

Yoga = \$7

Food = \$30