

Atlas

อนุเทศย ภูงททนต



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Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Lopburi/Saraburi/Ayutthaya, Samut, Songkhram/Samut Sakhon/Nakhon Pathom, Pattaya/Rayong

January 5 through 21, 2006 15 nights / 14 days

Fall 2006 dates: Late November through early December. Contact Mick for more information.

Private Tours: If you and a group of your friends prefer, a private culinary tour can be arranged for your group, and venues can be customized. Dates to avoid are March through May (the warmest time of the year and oppressively hot), and August through October (monsoonal rains). Additionally, the period around Christmas to New Year's Day is frenzied, hotels can be hard to book, and most venues are packed with Thai tourists. Minimum group size is 6 participants. Additional options to Angkor Wat in Cambodia, or Luang Prabang in Laos are also available. Contact Mick for more information. info@atlasculinaryadventures.com

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\$3500, double occupancy, includes all meals, hotels, transfers, and transportation within Thailand; Single supplement: \$895.

Come join Atlas Culinary Adventures on a 15-day culinary tour of Thailand, "The Land of Smiles". The old adage that you haven't truly eaten Thai food until you've eaten it in Thailand is absolutely true. The purpose of our trip is to fully expose you to Thailand's vast and varied culinary wealth, while examining how Thai food producers, markets, and cooks seamlessly interact to produce what is one of the world's most unique and most popular regional cuisines and flavor profiles. For those that might worry about their kitchen abilities, no cooking skills are required. If you can use a fork and spoon and have an adventurous and healthy appetite, your skill set is complete.

Pleasures of Thai Food : Thai food is seductive and subtle, while intense at the same time. It fully engages all of the senses simultaneously: taste, texture, aroma, visual, and yes, even aural. A surprisingly large percentage of the dishes you will eat are not spicy, and many Thais abstain from piquant food. It is a cuisine strictly based on the absolute freshest of ingredients, with a market system that stresses purity of product in a dizzying range of variety, and rapid dispersal from the fields and waters. Product you see artistically displayed that day will usually have been harvested early that same morning. The diversity of incredible tropical

fruits in Thailand is astounding; most you will have never seen or tasted before, with a range of flavors and textures that is amazing. Thai's are impeccably clean and sanitary in their food production methods, and there is intense competition among food venues, which guarantees that only the best and cleanest survive the intense Darwinian competition to serve the public. The Thai day is dominated by constant nibbling between their four or five regular meals, reinforcing a food culture based on street vendors and small cafes that specialize in perfecting a single dish over decades, by successive generations of family cooks.

Thai Culture and Art : We will also immerse you in Thai culture and art, and take you to some of the most spectacular and most historic Buddhist temples in the world. This trip is a visual feast as well as culinary. We'll explore widely varied areas of one of the most beautiful and scenic countries in SE Asia. Sites we visit will range from the cool, misty jungle mountains of the north, to the broad central floodplains of the Chao Phraya river basin (the Mississippi River of Thailand) to the palm-studded sparkling beaches, coastal plains, and mountains of the southeastern coast, known as 'The Fruit Basket of Thailand' and an area of intense seafood production. Bangkok will be our base of operations, a city of 12 million steeped in Asian tradition and mystery, and brimming with Western modernity. Both attributes are reflected in its nicknames: 'The City of Angels' and 'The Big Mango'. The superb dining opportunities countrywide are endless.

Weather : Thailand is a country about the size of Texas. All 1,115 miles of the country from north to south fall between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, so the weather is hot and steamy. Fortunately, our travel dates occur during the cooler and drier part of their year, so you might expect temperatures in Bangkok and the coastal plains to be in the low 90's during the day and the mid 70's at night. Up in the mountains of the north it will be balmy and less humid during the day, but can get cool enough at night for a sweater or some polar fleece to come in handy. If rain occurs it should be in small amounts and of short duration.

Shopping : We will be shopping in a vast array of markets for Thailand's famous products and crafts (textiles, handicrafts, food products, jewelry, basketry, pottery, etc) at very competitive prices. They can be found at floating (water) markets; street markets, where traffic is shut off in favor of pedestrians; day markets (morning and evening, produce markets, "wet" markets, vast flower markets, wholesale markets); weekend-only markets, such as Bangkok's Chatauchak (the world's largest open-air market, with some 12,000 vendors covering 40 acres, selling everything imaginable). Every market, regardless of what it's selling, will have a wealth of food vendors and a fresh-cut flower component, producing captivating fragrances and colors.

Transportation : You'll be met at Don Muang International Airport upon arrival and brought directly to the hotel by coach. We'll use every method of local transportation. In Bangkok we'll rely heavily on the Skytrain state-of-the-art elevated transit rail system, the new superb MRTA subway system, and Thailand's famed longtail boats, water taxis, and ferries to avoid what can be some of the world's worst traffic. We'll take a jet flight up to the mountainous north country around Chiang Mai, where a ride in one of Thailand's famous three-wheeled tuk tuk's is a must. Day trips outside the cities will be in comfortable first-class private coaches with restrooms on board.

Hotels : We will stay in what are considered 4 and 5 star hotels with all of the modern Western conveniences throughout the tour, and links to each will be provided on the Atlas website so that you can see exactly where you'll be staying.

Dining : We will specialize in eating the most authentic Thai foods possible, dining in restaurants frequented almost exclusively by the locals. *Farang* (foreigners, like us) diners will be an oddity at most of our dining venues. We have developed a database of some of the finest restaurants in Thailand, with many of them featuring old-style traditional dishes that are rapidly disappearing from the Thai culinary repertoire. We will dine in venues that range from luxurious restaurants to street vendors and shed-roof cafés. Many of the dishes and ingredients you'll see, eat, and drool over are items rarely, if ever, served in the States. You will get the true taste of Thailand's varied regional cuisines!

Note : Atlas is including *all* of your meals, which is something that hardly any other culinary tour company does. Most other companies leave you to find your own way around for up to one third of the total meals on a trip (which can be a considerable added expense). They give you a map and a list of restaurants from which to choose when you are clueless.

Drinks : Thailand has many alcoholic treats to sample: vineyards producing world-class wines (as well as a wide range of wine imports from South America, Australia, New Zealand, and France), incredible beers and ales in both SE Asian and European styles, and locally-made sugar cane rums and rice-based whiskies. Most are relatively inexpensive by American standards, and at almost all restaurants and many bars it's quite acceptable to bring in your own bottles of liquor.

As for non-alcoholic drinks, there is a huge range from which to choose: tropical fruit soft drinks, Thai coffee, Thai iced tea, pandan leaf tea, herb teas, a large range of fresh-squeezed fruit juices and smoothies (nothing is as refreshing as icy tangerine juice!), drinks made from bael and roselle fruits, and iced bottled water everywhere we go.

Here are a few of the entries from my dining logs from previous Thai trips, just to give you an idea of the types of dishes we'll enjoy:

*The most succulent Issan-style *gai yang* (grilled smoky chicken; our group of 5 ate 4 whole chickens), cooked under a shed on the side of the road, halfway up Thailand's tallest mountain, prepared by grandma, mom, and daughter; accompanied by exceptional *laab* and *som tam* salads and stir-fried vegetables just-picked from their terraced gardens.

*Ethereal tender squid served in its own ink, fried whole grouper with tamarind sauce, and an aromatic *tom yum* soup with squid (stuffed with luscious squid eggs) under swaying palm trees at night, at a hidden beachside spot on the Gulf of Siam, with the fishing boats in the distance on the bay lit up like Christmas trees.

*Perfectly-grilled, succulent foot-long giant river prawns, eaten at a simple *khlong*-side joint in the old section of Bang Pa In; a spot which is secretly known by aficionados as *the* best restaurant to eat these in all of Thailand. The superlative chef is an old grandma who might weigh 70 pounds soaking wet.

*The most amazing soup noodles and pork wontons in pork broth, except the 'pasta' and wonton wrappers are made completely out of a mortar and pestle-pounded paste of the freshest seafood of a dozen different types, served under a shed roof just off of the beach in Ban Phae. Vendors of grilled pork satay, fire-roasted corn on the cob drizzled with chile, coconut cream and shaved coconut, and sesame crepe line the café edges to complete the meal.

*Northern traditional hilltribe dishes such as Thailand's best *kao soi* (red curry wheat noodle soup with beef or chicken, a dish that *Saveur* called one of the world's top ten ethnic delights) from simple Samoie Jai and Ting Ting Mao Cafés in Chiang Mai.

*A 'forest food' restaurant in Chiang Mai that serves incredible (and unusual) shredded white turmeric salad, red curry soup with ant eggs, a fruit salad made completely from wild forest fruits, and earthstar puffball mushroom curry.

Additional Dish descriptions: Other dishes that are guaranteed to delight:

Spicy wing bean & shrimp salad with coconut milk dressing

She-crab and crab roe stir-fried with southern Muslim curry powder

Auswan: tiny fresh oysters, poi-like savory tapioca, sprouts, and scrambled egg mixed together on a sizzling platter...so good you can't stop eating it

Haw moke: fresh fish and curried coconut custard steamed in banana leaf

Lotus stem and river prawn stir fry

Razor clam curry with fresh, local green peppercorns and holy basil

Pomelo *som tam* salad with mangrove crab

Shrimp, pork, and fermented soybean dip with crudités (*lon*): hard to find, addictively good

A huge range of different fire-roasted *nam phrik* chile dips eaten with fresh veggies and fresh-fried pork cracklings

Gaeng som curry w/pickled bamboo shoot & snakehead fish

Fried 'one-day-sun' fish with sweet chile sauce and bitter neem leaf tips

Hainan-style chicken and rice (*khao mun kai*)

Soi Polo-style marinated fried chicken with garlic sauce...the best fried chicken you will ever eat, anywhere

Bangkok crispy-skin chicken: the Thai chicken equivalent to Peking Duck

Green curry with fresh fish 'balls' and tiny eggplants

Shredded sweet and tart green mango salad with crabmeat

Cassia flowers, lightly tempura-battered, and made into a salad

Gaeng pa jungle (no coconut milk) curry with wild boar

Steamed cultivated green lip mussels w/lemongrass, shallots, & makroot leaves

Bean curd sheet stuffed with crab filling, fried and served with honey sauce

Spicy minced duck salad with mint, with a side of delicious duck tongues with garlic, and duck noodle soup

Shrimp curry with young coconut meat and tamarind

Yen ta fo noodles with squid, jellyfish, sliced fishcake, and shrimp balls

Fish maw and velvet seafood soup with white fungus and hard-boiled quail eggs

Water spinach fritters, as a salad with coconut cream dressing

Chomwan leaf and pork curry (this tree leaf tastes just like our plums, only better)

Free-range chicken with tart *rakham* fruit

Gaeng som: green papaya curry with seafood

Pork 'dry' jungle curry with cumin leaf (*moo pud yee rah*)

Fluffy featherback fish salad, pounded and flash-fried

Khao kuk kapi: the best fried rice on the planet...the rice is cooked with shrimp paste and palm sugar and comes in the middle, surrounded by caramelized ground pork, fried dried shrimps, omelet threads, cucumber slices, minced Thai chiles, lime wedges, and topped with cilantro...it's a grandmother dish, hard to find even in Bangkok alleys

Phun klip crispy fried pies: savory, tiny, and stuffed with sweetened pork or fish...an accompaniment for drinks, made by patient and skilled little old ladies

Miang kham : do-it-yourself, roll-your-own packages of shredded ginger or white turmeric, dried shrimp, peanuts, small cubes of fresh lime, toasted coconut flakes, chile peppers, *chaplu* leaves, a sweet and tangy taling-pling fruit sauce spooned in before rolling

Gaeng ohm: a spicy Issan chicken soup with lots of fresh dill

Khanom jeen num ya: rice vermicelli noodles topped with a curry of pounded fish, garnished with pickled cabbage & Thai lemon basil

Bai ma khaam ohn kathit: young tamarind leaves in coconut milk with pork

Ground pork stir fried with chopped preserved Chinese water olives and dried red chiles

Coconut and jackfruit ice cream with cashews

Tropical fruit gelatos

Coconut cream and palm sugar custards: *khanom khrok*

Scores of different tropical fruits eaten fresh, some of them are sprinkled with chile, palm sugar, and salt

...and a whole range of Thai sweets that borrow heavily from the Portuguese influence from the 1500's.

Agriculture : Thailand was the major cradle of agriculture in the world's history. Consider these facts: There is confirmation of permanent habitation sites 37,000 years ago near Krabi, and proof of the earliest domestication of plants in the world in Northern Thailand, beginning in 9,700 B.C. Evidence further suggests that legumes and chickens were encouraged around dwellings as early as 10-20,000 years ago. Thailand is also thought to be the ancestral home of today's domestic chicken.

In Ban Chiang in the northeast there is evidence of bronze production 5,000 to 7,000 years ago, predating Mesopotamian bronze. The world's earliest socketed iron axe was made here in 2700 BC., and the development of iron ploughs increased the area a farmer could work by a factor of seven.

The Tai were the first civilization to develop wet rice cultivation; they were growing rice in Ban Prasat in 4,000 B.C. while the Chinese were still growing millet. There was emergence of irrigation canal engineering skills in U Thong (called by Indian missionaries 'The Cradle of Gold') in the 1st century B.C. Thais are universally credited with developing the outrigger canoe. Thailand has always been known through history as one of the few totally independent food producers, capable of self-generating all of the food necessary for its peoples.

We'll examine the food production methods of numerous components of the Thai flavor profile, while we compare the ancient agricultural practices with the modern. We'll see the Royal Project new crop introductions that have converted the hilltribe agriculture of the mountainous north from opium-based to newer innovative crops. You'll see first hand how the foods are

grown, produced, and harvested; how the seafood is caught and sent to market or held in live tanks for consumption. Here are some of the facilities we plan on visiting:

Sea salt evaporation ponds outside Samut Sakhon

Fruit plantations: Suan Supatraland Orchard, Rayong, and others....

You'll see fruits such as durian, jackfruit, cashew fruit, rambutan, pomelo, champu (red & green), mangosteen, starfruit, salat, rakham, sugar palm, pineapple (many varieties), dragon fruit, longan, lychee, lamyai, langsung, table and wine grapes, mango (sweet and green/sour), passionfruit, guava, papaya (green and ripe), Thai green orange, tangerine, pomelo, santol, gandaria, star gooseberry, Burmese grape, sweetsop, soursop, breadfruit, coconut, banana (many varieties), tamarind (sweet & sour), etc.

Sugar palm factory: one of the several *tao tan's* near Samut Songkhram

Artisanal, grade AAA fish sauce factory: Golden Boy Brand in Rayong

Boonrawd / Singha Beer brewery in BKK

The Golden Jubilee Museum of Agriculture in BKK

Bangyikhan Thai rice whisky and rum distillery in BKK

'Duc de Praslin' Belgian Chocolate Factory in BKK

State-of-the-art premium fine wine vineyards in the mountain valleys near Khao Yai National Park (which is itself a World Heritage Site)

Siracha chile sauce factory (Sauce S. Chatra Co., Samut Prakarn)

Intensively-managed organic vegetable and cut-flower farms

Rice farms: wet land, dry land, and sticky rice

Cherry farms (which should be in full bloom), Mae Salong

Citrus farms up north in the mountains and in the central plains

Terraced coffee and tea plantations in the northern mountains near Mae Salong

Black tiger shrimp farms near Rayong and Samut Songkhram

Squid boat fishing and drying around Rayong

Water buffalo training camp to see the old, pre-mechanical style of farming and

harvesting: Baan Kwai Thai Mae Rim, outside CM

Innovative Doi Kham Royal Project farms around CM

Peppercorn and dragon fruit farms in Rayong

Massive sunflower fields near Saraburi, ...and others

Food market tours : We will extensively tour a number of different types of major food markets all over the country, have concise explanations of the ingredients, and experience a phenomenal variety of foods (both cultivated and wild), while sampling and tasting as we go:

Aw Taw Kaw (Or Tor Kor /'OTK') organic wet market in BKK: Thailand's premier organic produce market, with scores of outstanding food vendors

Soi Issaranuphap Chinese Food Market in BKK Chinatown, to see the old-school methods of marketing

Talat Pak Klong Flower Market on the Chao Phraya River in BKK, in the very early morning, when it is at its peak (before we leave for the floating markets) with acres of vivid, fragrant flowers

Damnoen Saduak Floating Market in Ratchaburi, a traditional canal market where we'll arrive early to avoid the crowds that bus-in from Bangkok

Mahachai Seafood Market in Samut Sakhon: the last traditional major seafood market in Thailand

Warorat Market in Chiang Mai: the North's major food market, complete with hilltribe forest foods

Nong Mon Street Market in Chonburi: excellent for specialized street food vendors

Tapong Fruit Market in Rayong: perhaps the premier fruit market in all of Thailand

Historical and Cultural Sites : In each major region we'll have specific historical and cultural sites to visit:

Bangkok:

Wat Phra Keo and the Grand Palace: an architectural wonder consecrated in 1782, composed of 100 buildings and temples, and site of the original Royal Palace. Phra Keo holds Thailand's most sacred image: the Emerald Buddha.

Wat Pho: Bangkok's oldest and biggest temple, with the largest reclining Buddha, and the leading collection of Buddha images (statues) in all of Thailand; first utilized as a temple in the 16th C.

Wat Arun: 'The Temple of Dawn': the original temple and palace of King Taksin, dating from the 16th C., covered with colorful Chinese tiles.

Royal Barge Museum: the repository of the magnificent ceremonial Royal boats. The King's is lavishly ornamented in gold, intricately carved, and is the largest dugout boat in the world (requiring 50 oarsmen).

National Museum: the largest museum in SE Asia and an excellent introduction to Thai art.

Wat Traimit: a 12th C. temple famous for its 5½ ton solid-gold Buddha image.

Chinatown: the Chinese were moved here in 1782 to make room for the new capital on the east side of the Chao Phraya River, now it typifies the frenzied hustle and bustle of a classic world-class Chinatown (with great shopping!).

Siam Square: where the younger set hangs out, and a perfect glimpse into the social life of today's Thai youth; MBK (Mahboonkrong) Mall across the street (9 floors tall with over 1,000 shops and stalls, has a great food court on the top floor).

Khlong cruise: we'll take a cruise down one of the canals that were the 'highways' of Bangkok in the old days (when it was called "The Venice of the East") for an intimate look to see how life goes on in the old neighborhoods.

Drinks one night at Vertigo (60 floors up) or Baiyoke Tower (84 floors up) for stunning night time aerial views of Bangkok.

Chiang Mai:

Doi Suthep: with the most revered Buddhist temple in the North, 1st established in 1383; & Doi Inthanon: the tallest mountain in Thailand (8,500 feet) with jungle and monsoonal dicarp forests...the top is a forest of rhododendron and orchids!

Tha Ton > Mae Salong > Golden Triangle/Opium Museum at Sop Ruak > Chiang Rai: perhaps one of the most picturesque drives in Thailand, through the granite mountains, valleys, and limestone karst outcroppings, lush with verdant jungle and tropical hardwood forest. The Golden Triangle is the confluence of the Nam Ruak and the famous Mekong Rivers, with Burma to the north and Laos to the east. The new opium museum has gotten universal praise.

Pa Saeng Da Textile Museum outside of San Patong: perfectly preserved from the early 1800's and still in use as a co-op of traditional hand-loomed, natural-dyed cotton textiles. This riverside Lanna-style teak house is captivating, and the weaving is of museum quality.

Night Bazaar: a mega-sized night street market selling everything; it has been in roughly the same location for the last 500 years, when it was used by Asian trade caravans

Tribal Museum in CM: provides an encompassing overview of the various ethnic minority tribes of the North, their handicrafts, and their lifestyles (Lisu, Lahu, Akha, Karen, Kayah, Hmong, Mien, and Shan).

Insect Museum in CM: self explanatory, small, and way-cool.

Handicraft villages: following the 'one village, one product' concept:

Bo Sang – umbrellas

Hang Dong & Ban Thawai – wood carving

San Kamphaeng – cotton & silk

San Kamphaeng Road – pottery and celadon

Pasang and San Patong – textiles

Lopburi / Saraburi / Khao Yai:

Wat Phra Puddhabat in Saraburi: one of the holiest temples in Thailand, where a 'real' Buddha footprint was discovered in the late 16th C.

Prang Sam Yot Temple: the famous monkey temple in Lopburi, of magnificent Khmer-style ruins.

Ayutthaya:

Founded as a kingdom in 1351, this island among 3 rivers is home to scores of picturesque restored temple ruins. It was the Thai capital for more than 400 years, and at its peak was the biggest city in the world, with a million inhabitants (a World Heritage Site). We'll visit incredible Wat Yai Chai Mongkhon ('Wat Yai', built in 1357), followed by a boat cruise back down the Chao Phraya river to Bangkok, which will provide relaxation, cold drinks, and revealing non-highway views of rural life and river commerce.

Southwest of Bangkok:

Ban Phaeo Floating Market on the Damoen Saduak Canal: the classic floating market of old Thailand.

Phra Pathom Chedi in Nakhon Pathom: the tallest Buddhist temple in the world (414 feet), and the cradle of Thai Buddhism (introduced to Siam at this site in the 3rd C. B.C.).

Samut Prakarn:

The 15-story tall Erawan Museum, built in the shape of a three-headed elephant, and luckiest of all of the Lotto shrines in Thailand, with traditional dancers and musicians aplenty.

Pattaya:

Phra Tamnak Hill & Wat Khao Phra Bat: for the best aerial views of the Pattaya coast.

Wihan (Viharn/Viharna) Sien Park (Royal Chinese Temple) / Wat Yanasangwararam: a collection of Chinese historical art that rivals any on mainland China.

Nong Nooch Gardens: a magnificent private botanical garden, world-renowned.

Shopping / Handicrafts:

We will devote adequate time to shopping for some of Thailand's famous handicrafts and products at the various markets, and there's quite a range from which to choose: textiles, handicrafts, food products, basketry, pottery, etc.

Food products: spices, peppercorns, curry pastes, shrimp paste, real palm sugar, artisanal fish sauce, liquors, teas & coffees, baked (dried) beef or pork, preserved fruits, etc.

Culinary equipment such as sit-on-top coconut scrapers, elaborate chopsticks, hand-woven place settings, mortar and pestle sets, knives, etc.

5-colored ceramics: *benjarong*

Cloisonné

Celadon: the ethereal crackle-green glaze that resembles jade

Pottery in both traditional and modern styles

Lacquer ware and niello ware

Intricately designed rattan ware, and fine basketry of indigenous fibers

Amulets and Buddhist religious art, monk's alms bowls

Jewelry and gems (with any gems and precious stones you should be *very* careful and buy only from reliable certified dealers)

Intricate silverwork and bronze ware

Textiles:

The finest silk in the world, in an unlimited range of colors

Handmade and natural-dyed cotton weaving

Indigo farm workers clothing (*mor hom*) and fisherman's pants (*kang keng ley*)

Batik cloth and fashions

Saris and sarongs, in all materials

Traditional *saa* paper umbrellas and fans

Triangle pillows ('axe' pillows)

Custom-tailored clothing: Thais are among the world's finest tailors and the prices and quality are quite attractive

Wood carving

Mother-of-pearl inlay

Traditional shadow puppets in leather (*nang*), hinged *nang talung* puppets, small *hun lakorn lek* puppets, papier-mâché *khon* masks, etc.

Note re: ไข้หวัดใหญ่ 2009: Threats of a pandemic notwithstanding, *all* travel and medical experts say there is no reason whatsoever to avoid travel to Thailand. All experts agree that the only way to catch the virus at this time is to be in continued, direct, and intimate contact with infected birds or someone who has it (an extremely rare occurrence). The Thai government has been very aggressive and open regarding its immediate reaction to, and isolation of, any outbreaks.

I would encourage you to stay up with the latest on *any* international public health issues through the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control sites, as well as the new US pandemic flu site: <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>

Travel Insurance: You are *strongly* urged to purchase comprehensive travel insurance that covers you for all travel and medical contingencies. With the price of trans-Pacific airfare and the low cost of the insurance, why take chances? See the Atlas website for a partial listing of reliable companies and a buying guide. www.atlasculinaryadventures.com

For much more detailed information with photos see the Thailand link at www.atlasculinaryadventures.com

For reservations, questions, or further information contact Mick at: info@atlasculinaryadventures.com



Mick Vann: Owner of *Atlas Culinary Adventures*, Mick is an Austin-based food writer, award-winning cookbook author, retired professional chef, horticulturist, and ethnic cuisine expert.



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