

## *Gardens of Paradise* *A Private Tour in Thailand*



Pack your gloves and spades away in the shed for a fortnight and experience tropical flowers and plants in their natural habitat with Tell Tale Travel, the specialist in authentic holidays.

Thailand is world-renowned for its astonishing natural beauty, with a vast array of flora and fauna. During this tour, as well as visiting formal gardens, botanical centres and farms, you will discover more personal gardens from a royal garden full of the Queen's favourite roses to the jungle-like rambling plot of a passionate retiree.

It goes without saying that this itinerary takes in Thailand's famous orchid farms, however, you will also have the unforgettable experience of hunting for orchids in the wild with an orchid expert. Finally, you will learn about horticulture in Thailand and how changes crop types and growing methods have improved the lives of countless people. As on all Tell Tale Travel holidays, you will discover authentic Thailand, meet unique local people on an equal basis, fit in some cultural activities yet have plenty of time to relax.

*This is a private tour and can be taken at your own pace. The itinerary can also be customised to suit you perfectly. Beach extensions are also possible.*



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### Day 1 – Saturday

Fly overnight from London Heathrow to Bangkok on a direct flight with Eva Air or Thai Airways. (Regional departures available via an add-on with BMI).

### Day 2 – Sunday



Welcome to Thailand! One of our drivers will meet you and whisk you away to a charming boutique hotel, set in the charm of Bangkok's days of oriental renaissance. In the oldest part of Bangkok, away from the commercial districts, your small but private courtyard will be your welcome oasis from the hustle and bustle of the city.

You'll enjoy the thoughtful touches in your room and the personal attention you will receive from the friendly staff and the owner.

You will have a little time to relax and look at our maps and tips to make the most of Bangkok. Later, your driver will be back to take you through the city lit up by night, We will reserve a table for you at an idyllic restaurant, set on the banks of the Chao Praya river, a favourite with members of both the Thai and British royal families (the restaurant is reasonably-priced by UK standards).

### Day 3 – Monday

After breakfast at your leisure, you will be picked up at 10am by one of our guides, Tong. He will take you to the main sites of the Grand Palace, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha Wat Pho, the oldest temple in Bangkok and Wat Arun. This day, whilst 'touristy' by Tell Tale Travel standards, will let you 'tick off' the main sights in Thailand, although you will get a flavour of local life by taking in amulet market and using public transport such as riverboat taxis. Tong will drop you back at around 4pm, which will give you some time to rest or relax.



Later, your driver will pick you up and take you out in the city for the evening. Do have a look at our tips to choose where to dine - from charming restaurants set in peaceful gardens to the hustle and bustle of Chinatown, you'll find something to suit you perfectly.

*Alternatively, particularly if you've been to Bangkok before, instead of a guide you can choose to have a driver allocated to you for the day who will take you where you'd like to go - you can choose from our recommended 'trails' or make your own.*

### Day 4 – Tuesday



It's time to start discovering the greener side of Thailand. First stop, Kukrit House, the home of the 13<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of Thailand, and now a much cared for museum. A rare haven in the teeming metropolis, Kukrit House is actually a complex of five interconnecting teak houses, set in two acres of lush gardens. The tranquil pathways contain an array of tropical plants and there is even a garden of Thai bonsai plants. You can ask one of the university students who volunteer here to be your guide or wander around at your leisure.

In the afternoon, you'll journey along the Chao Praya River on a private boat journey in a traditional wooden boat with our boatman, Mr Tai. This journey will give you a glimpse into life in Bangkok, both present and past and a key highlight will be the explosion of colour at an orchid farm on the river. At



the end of your journey, you'll be dropped off at the pier by Bangkok's famous Mandarin Oriental hotel, which dates back to 1876. We recommend having a walk in the vibrant gardens and taking afternoon tea before heading back to your hotel (your driver will wait for you).

### *Day 5 - Wednesday*

Today, you'll have the morning free to pack up or relax in your courtyard or go for a walk in the local area.

Your driver will pick you up at midday, you can stop for lunch in a charming courtyard restaurant, then either do a little bit of sightseeing or fit in some shopping. In the late afternoon, you will be taken to the train station in the centre of Bangkok to catch an overnight train to the north of the country. Watch the bustle of the city slip away to traditional rural life unwinding for the day, before you settle down for the night in your private first class cabin.

### *Day 6 - Thursday*

You'll wake up early this morning and can have breakfast in your cabin before you arrive in Chiang Mai in the north, where one of our drivers will pick you up at the train station. Chiang Mai is known as the 'Rose of the North' and is surrounded by incredibly green countryside of rolling hills and valleys and jungle and waterfalls.



Your driver will take you to the residential area, Mae Rim, set in the Mae Sa valley. Here, you'll be guests of Mae and her husband Por and their extended family. Mae and Por are a retired nurse and surveyor respectively, these days Mae indulges her love of pottery and Por is a keen gardener. You can spend the morning settling into the top floor of the house which you will have to yourselves, before having a delicious home-cooked lunch with Mae and Por. After lunch, Por will give you a tour of his incredible jungle-like gardens, which are dotted with Mae's artistic creations.

This evening, your driver will be back to take you into Chiang Mai to visit the city by night. You can visit the famous night bazaar (although bear in mind it's touristy), or just have dinner at one of the plethora of excellent restaurants the city has to offer, we particularly recommend dining by the river.

### *Day 7 - Friday*

Today, you will take a short drive to Queen Sirikit Botanical Gardens (stopping at one of Chiang Mai's famous orchid farms along the way).

Queen Sirikit Botanical Gardens is a world-renowned centre of botanical learning, set in vast grounds, filled with a vast array of tropical flowers, trees, shrubs and creepers. Explore the greenhouses and rainforest area with its manmade waterfalls or take a walk in grounds. Everything is well-signed and the gardens are home to many unusual plants from *Tacca chantrieri*, the Bat Plant, to exotic begonias and edible plants including a wide variety of ginger.

**Tell Tale Tip** *We recommend taking one of the four walking trails: the arboretum trail, the climber trail (particularly beautiful), the waterfall and ornamental beds trail or the medicinal plants trail.*



One of our unique network of local people works at the botanical gardens; he will show you around and introduce you to the various specialists so you can ask questions on the areas that interest you personally. At the end of the day, he will take you to his village, a tiny Hmong hilltribe community



where you will be welcomed as a guest. You'll be shown the village's hemp museum and go for a walk around the village to see the crops they grow. Then, you will be driven back to Mae's where you can put your feet up and reflect on everything you've seen and learnt today.

### **Day 8 – Saturday**

Today, you'll visit the spectacular gardens of Bhubing Palace, an official residence of Thailand's revered Royal Family and open to the public when they are away.

These beautifully-landscaped gardens are set atop the mountain of Doi Suthep, where you can enjoy the cool and remarkably fresh air and stunning views over Chiang Mai. Every gardener's dream, as well as containing a vast range of tropical flora and plants, these gardens have an array of flowers from orchids to hydrangea and the Queen's favourite roses, including Alec's Red and Angel Face. The Fern Garden is utterly charming. After wandering around the gardens at your leisure, you can walk down the mountain to Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep, a famous Buddhist temple that contains beautiful pagodas, statues and bells.



### **Day 9 – Sunday**



Time for some sightseeing. Your driver will take you to the historic city of Chiang Mai. Part of the original lay out of the city can still be seen today in the walls and moat. You will start off with a visit to the ancient city of Kum Kiam, just outside the city centre that you can explore by hiring a pony and trap. Then you can visit a selection of the many wats (temples) and religious sanctuaries in the city itself.

**Tell Tale Tip** *If you are thinking of shopping for handicrafts, we recommend the Sunday market, which is less touristy than the famous night bazaar.*

Tonight, at Mae's you will have an informal lesson in Thai cooking from the ladies of the house before feasting on your efforts.

### **Day 10 – Monday**

This morning, one of our guides, Nui, will pick you up and take you to a unique eco-village high in the hills outside Chiang Mai where the air is particularly pure. This village is self-sustaining; its people farm in the surrounding forests and the waterfall irrigates the crops and powers the generator.

You'll arrive at the village shop/coffee bar where you will meet one of the villagers who will be your guide. Nui will translate for the village's guide as you start with a cup of 'miang', locally grown tea, from a wooden cup by the roadside, before beginning your walk. You'll be shown around the village, see the women who make baskets by hand and learn how the villagers grow and harvest their crops. Then, you will have lunch at the village's 'restaurant' before being taken for a walk up around the forests. As well as the tropical flora and fauna you will discover amongst the gigantic trees (including the endangered *Aquilaria Crassna*, agarwood), farmers at work harvesting crops in the forests.

**Tell Tale Tip** *At the end of your visit, make sure to pick up some of the delicious coffee at the village shop which is run as a co-operative.*



### Day 11 – Tuesday



This morning, it's time to pack up and say goodbye to your new friends Mae and Por. You will be driven to the Doi Saket area, in the countryside outside Chiang Mai. You will be staying in a colonial style villa in an area rich with ricefields, owned by English/Hong Kong expats have lived in Thailand for several years. When you arrive, you'll have lunch on the terrace and then spend the afternoon settling in, relaxing in the garden with a good book or enjoying the pool.

### Day 12 – Wednesday

An early start – you will go for a nature walk in Chiang Dao (about an hour's drive away) with our orchid expert Rachen, a retired university lecturer. Thailand's third largest mountain, Doi Chiang Dao is one of the best places for spotting orchids in the wild and over 20 species of endangered orchids grow here, including the *Sirindhornia Pulchella* (pictured) which was discovered here. The mountain is also home to rare flora and fauna, as well as the Bhutan Glory, a beautiful butterfly first discovered in Chiang Dao as well as many types of tropical birds such as the Giant Nuthatch, which is extinct elsewhere.



You'll have some of the afternoon to relax. Tonight, you will have dinner at one of the best restaurants in the local area.

### Day 13 – Thursday



This morning, after you have one of their delicious breakfasts (accompanied with freshly-squeezed juice and homemade bread), your expat hosts, Don & Ken will take you for a walk in the local area. You'll see their village's temple, the local reservoir teeming with fish and go for a boat ride down the Ping River (*please note this is dependent on water levels*). Ken is an excellent cook, having run a restaurant in Europe and having lived in Thailand a few years can give you an insight into the inventive ways various plants and flowers are used in Thai cuisine.

### Day 14 – Friday

Today, your driver will take you explore Doi Inthanon, Thailand's highest peak, which rises to a height of over 8,000 feet above sea level and gives refreshingly brisk temperatures all year. The mountain boasts sub montane rainforests with dense vegetation and is also home to an agricultural scheme.

This Royal Project was set up some years ago to encourage the hilltribe folk who live on the mountain to take advantage of the climate to grow crops other than opium poppies. The climate has provided the means for them to grow plants as 'exotic' as asparagus. You will see a vast array of crops as well as flower farms, strawberry fields and a rainbow trout farm. After you have explored the Royal Project, you can drive up to the summit, take a walk along one of the scenic nature trails or visit one of the spectacular waterfalls for a refreshing swim.



### *Day 15 – Saturday*

Today, you'll visit the Ratchaphruek centre. These vast gardens were developed in 2006 to host a three-month show with the purpose of thanking the King of Thailand who has helped improve the quality of life for millions of people, particularly through his work in establishing Royal Projects in agriculture and horticulture. The show was the culmination of a year's celebrations to mark his 60th year on the throne, making him the longest-reigning monarch in the world.

Whilst much quieter these days, the gardens will make for an interesting day – particularly the international gardens in which participating countries created gardens to reflect their identities. As well as the many plants and flowers, there are many interesting features such as China's pavilions and Japan's model of Mount Fuji (1,500 sq meters). Other participating countries were Bhutan, Morocco, Kenya (pictured) and Brazil. We will arrange for you to be shown around the gardens by a member of staff.



### *Day 16 – Sunday*

An early start this morning. It's time to say goodbye to Thailand. You'll be driven to Chiang Mai airport first thing in the morning and you will catch a short flight to Bangkok before flying onto the UK.

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*This specially designed 16-day itinerary costs from £1,600 per person based on two adults sharing. This includes direct flights, accommodation, activities, transport and meals except as listed below. Please allow £50 per person for entrance fees plus whatever you wish to spend on other items not included (see below). Please note that your itinerary may change, we will endeavour to keep you informed.*

*Flight upgrades are available on premium economy with Eva Air for an additional charge of £400 per person and on business class with Eva Air or Thai Airways (charges vary and available on request).*

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### **EXCLUDED:**

*Breakfast: Day 6*  
*Lunch: Days 3-5, 7-19, 12, 15-16*  
*Dinner: Days 2-6, 8*

Personal travel insurance  
Entrance fees  
Expenses of a personal nature such as laundry, Internet access and alcoholic drinks  
Expenses during free time  
Tips for guides and drivers (discretionary)

### ***Background Information***

Tell Tale Travel is a specialist tour operator. Each trip is tailor-made yet affordable, while respectful of local people and places. We are small enough to give you true personal service yet experienced and knowledgeable enough to make sure you have the organisation and back-up you need. When you are on your holiday, you will have a detailed itinerary and plenty of tips and recommendations. As well as support from our unique network of local people, you can also contact either our London office or Thai office at any time.

Tell Tale Travel is a London-based company, subject to English law. We are licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority so your holiday will be protected by ATOL. We are also licensed by the Travel Trust Association which gives you 100% protection on all elements of your holiday.

### ***What makes Tell Tale Travel holidays so special?***

#### ***Hand-selected***

Every element of a Tell Tale journey has been hand-selected by us, not by other people. We painstakingly hunt out the best authentic experiences. If we don't think it's the finest Thailand has to offer or we wouldn't want to do it, we won't tell you about it.

#### ***Local Insight***

You'll meet local people that we have chosen to show you the real Thailand. Furthermore, you'll experience the overwhelming warmth of genuine hospitality throughout your holiday.

#### ***Just For You***

You don't have to share your experience with a tour group or a tour leader. And as it's just for you – just tell us what you want to do and we'll make sure you do it.

#### ***Responsible Tourism***

You will be able to see first-hand how your money benefits local people and communities. A supplementary income enables a better quality of life in small villages and a chance to share their culture, history and lifestyle with the outside world.

#### ***Hassle Free Organisation***

We will organise everything we can. This means you can get the best Thailand has to offer, such as a particular scenic train journey without the inconvenience of organising it. Where we are not able to organise something in advance for you, we will give you guidance or a local contact.

#### ***Guidance***

Guidebooks by their nature are out of date from the day they're published. We give you insider up-to-the-minute information on the best things to do. We also give you general advice that will help you throughout your journey to the extent of cultural and clothing tips depending on what you are doing on a particular day.

#### ***Fair Prices***

We only sell our own holidays, this means we can make sure everyone involved, you and our network of local people, get a fair price. And unlike other operators, we don't have surcharges - whether you're booking with your credit card or if after you've booked there's a change in the exchange rates which makes our costs higher, you still pay the same.

