

Sweet Mango Tours'

Photographer's Journey to Isaan Day to Day Itinerary November 8 - 23, 2008

Always a draft...as we continually seek ways to enhance your experience

Day 0 Saturday, November 8 (Gathering)

Airport pick-ups are available. Everyone must plan to be at our hotel by 2:00 am Sunday (many flights arrive around midnight)

Day 1 Sunday, November 9 (Introductions and Chinatown)

After an exploration of the early morning market around the corner from our hotel, we'll meet in a designated hotel room for an introductory gathering - we'll go over the itinerary and what to expect. Craig Line will walk us through the course plan and answer questions. We'll then take the river taxi to Chinatown and explore the pharmacies, alleys and hustle and bustle of this fascinating Thai-Chinese neighborhood. We return to the hotel after lunch to download photos. We will be attentive but flexible with the exact timing of discussion and other course activities. We'll board long-tail boats at dusk and take pictures of life along the city's extensive canal system. (L/D)

Day 2 Monday, November 10 (Temples and Massage)

We'll likely be up early - a great time to view and shoot Wat Arun, the "Temple of Dawn," on the Chao Praya River. Not far from Wat Arun is a flower market that will keep your shutters busy. We'll spend the rest of the morning at the majestic Wat Phra Kaew, home of the Emerald Buddha, and explore the grounds of the Grand Palace. We'll wander over to Wat Po to view the Reclining Buddha then ease our jetlag at Wat Po's School of Traditional Thai Massage. The river taxi will take us back to our hotel in the late afternoon, leaving time to download pictures, share stories and delve into a particular photography topic. Then it's early to bed. (B/L)

Day 3 - 5 Tuesday, November 11 - Thursday, November 13 (Road Trip to Isaan)

This morning we depart for a three-day road trip across Northeast Thailand (Isaan). Each day we have a hotel destination determined by dawn and/or dusk shooting opportunities. We will stop when we feel like it - the rice fields will be lush and green and busy with harvesting activities. Water buffalo, farmers, and the flat expanse of rural life will call us to stop and take pictures. There are Khmer temple ruins along the way. We'll wander local town markets in the morning. The climate allows everyday life to be outdoors almost all the time - street life is always active. Oh, and then there's the elephant training camp - and a ride. We arrive in Ubon in the afternoon of November 13th. We'll settle in at Rajaphat University's Cultural Center and take some time to download and share before we have dinner. (B/L/D each day)

Day 6 Friday, November 14 (Theravadan Buddhism and Forest Temples)

We leave early this morning for Wat Pah Nanachat (<http://www.watpahnachat.org/>), an international Buddhist forest temple founded by Ajaan Chah in the 1970's. It is home to practicing monks and nuns from around the world. We'll offer dishes for the morning meal and join the locals for a morning meditation. After breakfast, we'll get a chance to chat with the Abbot or other English-speaking resident monk. We'll visit Ajaan Chah's original forest home temple and learn about his influence on the Thai and Isaan cultures. Return to the hotel to download and share. In the late afternoon, we'll wander the provincial fields where, in addition to celebrations, locals are playing basketball, football (soccer), takraw, Thai boxing and aerobics. Dinner will be in the night market. Overnight at the Cultural Center. (B/L)

Day 7 Saturday, November 15 (Around Ubon)

An early optional trip to the sprawling morning market in Warin Chamrap District is offered. Breakfast will be at the Asoke Community's vegetarian restaurant where we'll get a guided tour of the market and their natural foods and remedy shop. There's an interesting cotton clothing shop nearby and we can visit Ubon's National History Museum and learn about Isaan geography, history and culture. The ground floor of our hotel also has a fantastic display about Isaan life and local Buddhist practice. At some point today we'll download and share. Dinner is in a popular Ubon restaurant, then get ready for our up-country adventure. Overnight in the Cultural Center. (B/D)

Day 8 Sunday, November 16 (Forest Temple Stay)

Following breakfast at the hotel, we'll travel to Wat Boon Lom or Wat Phu Jom Kom, recently established remote temples affiliated with Wat Pah Nanachat. We will stay in the temple guest house for the night and learn more about the life of practicing forest monks. (B/L/D)

- Day 9 Monday, November 17 (Arrival in the Village)**
After morning meditation, conversation with the Abbot, and a chance to shoot, download, process and share photos, we'll travel to our village home. We'll be welcomed and introduced (distributed) to our families, then move into our host family homes - each family will take care of you for the afternoon - we'll gather for dinner and share stories - and plan for the photography workshop project. Overnight in the village. (B/L/D)
- Day 10 Tuesday, November 18 - Thursday, November 20 (Village Home-Stay)**
Each morning while in the village, we'll offer alms (food) to the monks with your family. Our meals will be prepared in a communal kitchen near our dining area, either the school or community center. You are welcome to watch, shoot and/or help with cooking. Our three-day stay will be designed around field trips and our community project - the production of a photo exhibit. Field trip options include early morning fishing, hiking trails around the village community forest, a long-tail boat ride down the Mekong, exploring a cave, a community tour of local handicrafts and trades, a nature walk, and/or helping with the rice-harvest. Evenings often lead to cross-cultural exchange of dance or song, bon-fire and more dancing, playing games with the village children and much more. We'll take time to download and share photos, delve into our course curriculum, and print and mat our exhibit photos. Sometime along the way, we'll be blessed with an Isaan traditional "Bai Sii" ceremony, offered to protect travelers and for other auspicious occasions. (B/L/D each day)
- Day 13 Friday, November 21 (Return to Ubon)**
Following breakfast and farewells, we'll return to Ubon to clean up and get organized, then catch the overnight train. We return to Bangkok in the train's air-conditioned sleeper cars. Dinner, once we've boarded, is Seenin's famous fried chicken, sticky rice and chili paste (and cold Singha beer if desired). (B/L/D)
- Day 14 Saturday, November 22 (Bangkok options)**
We arrive very early in Bangkok and transfer to Silom Village Inn. The itinerary offers free time - but Sweet Mango staff is available for spontaneous, self-organizing field trips. Options include taking the Sky-Train to Chatuchak's sprawling, outdoor, weekend market, or a tour of the museum-like home of mysteriously-disappeared, silk-industry mogul Jim Thompson, and/or a lengthy walking tour of the Silom neighborhood. Some of our time today will be dedicated to course reflection and evaluation - and, of course, packing up. We'll dine together and watch traditional Thai dancing in the hotel's outdoor restaurant. (D)
- Day 15 Sunday, November 23 (Departures)**
If desired, Sweet Mango staff will help you get where you need to be today.