

Sweet Mango Tours'

Thailand's Sacred Places

Day to Day Itinerary

January 30 - February 14, 2009

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

- Day 0** **Friday, January 30 (Gathering)**
Airport pick-ups are available. Everyone must plan to be at our hotel by 2:00 am Saturday (many flights arrive around midnight)
- Day 1** **Saturday, January 31 (Bangkok Temples and Thai Massage)**
After an optional visit to the morning market near our hotel, we'll meet in the lobby for an introductory gathering - we'll go over the itinerary and how we'll travel together. We'll then walk to the pier and board a river taxi on the Chao Praya River. Guided tours through Wat Phra Kaew (home of the Emerald Buddha) and Wat Po (...Reclining Buddha) will bring the ornate and majestic temples, and the faith(s) behind them, to life. We can ease our jetlag at Wat Po's School of Traditional Thai Massage, then return briefly to our hotel to clean up and grab our bags. Dinner is at the train station while we wait for our 8:30 pm overnight train departure. (L/D)
- Day 2** **Sunday, February 1 (Ubon Ratchathani, Isaan)**
We arrive early in Ubon Ratchathani - a city on the Mun River, 630 kms directly east from Bangkok, near Laos and Cambodia. After dropping our bags and cleaning up a bit at Rajaphat University's Cultural Center (our hotel), we'll go to the Asoke Vegetarian Restaurant for breakfast. We'll learn about the Santi Asoke Buddhist community and visit the natural herb and remedy shop on site. We'll then travel by foot and songtaew (open-backed truck/taxi) to the Natural History Museum downtown. Travelers can choose to return to the hotel to rest or wander the streets and alleys of this off-the-beaten-track city. The ground floor of our hotel has a fantastic display about Isaan life and local Buddhist practice. In the evening, we'll explore Ubon's Provincial Field with the option of joining activities like outdoor aerobics, water colors or takraw (volleyball but with your feet!) Dinner is in the night market and then we'll return to our hotel for a good night's sleep. (B/D)
- Days 3 - 6** **Monday, February 2 through Thursday, February 5 (Retreat at Wat Pah Nanachat)**
Early this morning we leave for Wat Pah Nanachat (<http://www.watpahnachat.org/>), the international forest temple founded by Ajaan Chah in the 1970's. It is home to practicing Theravadin Buddhist monks and nuns from around the world. We'll offer dishes for the morning meal and join the locals for a morning meditation. We will meet with the Abbot and prepare for our three day retreat. (B each day - we'll eat one meal a day as do our hosts)
- Day 7** **Friday, February 6 (Return to Ubon)**
Following morning meditation and farewells, we'll return to Ubon, stopping to visit Ajaan Chah's original forest temple home, Wat Nong Pa Pong. The afternoon is free with guides available for optional organized activities. The city is fun and easy to explore - by foot and by songtaew. Dinner will be at a popular Ubon restaurant, and then we'll get ready for our up-country adventure. Overnight in the Cultural Center. (B/L/D)
- Days 8 - 10** **Saturday, February 7 through Monday, February 9 (Village Home-Stay)**
Start your day with an optional trip to the sprawling morning market across the Mun River in Warin Chamrap District. Then we'll all travel to our host village, be welcomed and distributed to our families, and "check in" to your host family home. We'll gather for a community tour in the afternoon, dine together and share stories. Each morning while in the village, you'll offer alms (food) to the monks with your family. Our own meals will be prepared in a communal kitchen near our dining area, either the school or community center. You are welcome to watch and/or help with cooking. Daily field trip options include early morning fishing, hiking trails around the village community forest, a long-tail boat ride down the Mekong, exploring a nearby cave, a community tour of local handicrafts and trades, a nature walk, and/or helping with the cassava-harvest. Evenings often lead to cross-cultural exchange of dance or song, bon-fire and more dancing, games with the village children and much more. 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)

Days 11 & 12 Tuesday, February 10 and Wednesday, February 11 (Forest Temple Stay)

We say good bye to our families and our village community and travel to a recently established remote temples affiliated with Wat Pah Nanachat - either Wat Boon Lom or Wat Phu Jom Kom depending on which monks are in residence at the time of our visit. We will stay in the temple guest house for the night and learn more about the life of practicing forest monks. (B each day)

Day 13 Thursday, February 12

How about an optional dawn “hiking-meditation,” through the jungle with headlamps, to a ridge overlooking the Mekong River to watch the sunrise over Laos. We’ll return for breakfast and farewells, then head back to Ubon to rest and pack up for another overnight train journey, this time to Bangkok. Dinner, once we’ve boarded, is our driver, Seenin’s famous fried chicken, sticky rice and chili paste. (B/L/D)

Day 14 Friday, February 13

We arrive early in Bangkok and transfer to our hotel. The itinerary offers free time - but Sweet Mango staff is available for spontaneous, self-organizing field trips. Options include a trek through Chinatown, 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. We’ll dine together in the evening and watch traditional Thai dancing in the hotel’s outdoor restaurant. (D)

Day 15 Saturday, February 14

Happy Valentine’s Day. Sweet Mango staff will help you get where you need to be today if so desired.