

The best MARCO POLO Insider Tips

Our top 15 Insider Tips



INSIDER TIP ▶ **Tasteful and nostalgic**

The *China Inn Cafe* in Phuket Town is a feast for your eyes as well as your taste buds: the city mansion in Sino-Portuguese style is 100 years old, the Thai cuisine is delicious and the fruit yoghurt is decorated with a blue flower → **p. 88**

INSIDER TIP ▶ **Chill out on the beach**

Rustic wooden bungalows surrounded by shady trees, grilled fish under palm leaf roofs and the fire show on the beach: *Porn's Bungalows* on Ko Chang hark back to the days when backpackers had this island to themselves → **p. 69**

INSIDER TIP ▶ **Pure relaxation**

The perfect combination of romance, comfort and a relaxing escape can be found in the paradise that is the *Oriental Kwai* resort near Kanchanaburi. A few days on the river or at the pool, or exploring the area, are just what the doctor ordered! → **p. 42**

INSIDER TIP ▶ **An artwork in white**

Demons, Batman and Buddha -- the *Wat Rong Khun* in Chiang Rai is a whimsical work of art all in white (photo above) → **p. 51**

INSIDER TIP ▶ **Wilderness adventure**

There is no place in Thailand more remote than the Umphang jungle on the Myanmar border. The country's most scenic river, the Mae Klong, is ideal for a boat tour → **p. 107**

INSIDER TIP ▶ **Oasis of peace**

At first glance, *Hotel Rachamankha* in Chiang Mai looks more like a temple furnished with antiques than a guesthouse. It's worth popping in, if only for a drink → **p. 49**

INSIDER TIP ▶ **Among demons**

At the *Sala Kaew Ku* sculpture garden in Nong Khai you have a monumental world of myth and legend almost to yourself → **p. 62**

INSIDER TIP ▶ **Stairway to Heaven**

The path is steep: 1,273 steps wind up a mountain from *Wat Tam Sua*, the "temple of the tiger cave", in Krabi. At the top a magnificent panorama awaits → **p. 87**

INSIDER TIP ▶ **Dining out with a temple view**

The terrace at *Sala Rattanakosin*, a restaurant near the Grand Palace in Bangkok, provides a stunning view over the Chao Phraya to the Temple of Dawn → **p. 38**

INSIDER TIP ▶ **A licence to ride**

In the jungle of the north, earn your elephant riding licence. At *Elephant Special Tours* in Mae Sopok, you can train to be a Mahout → **p. 49**

INSIDER TIP ▶ **Luxury bargain**

A luxury hotel suite for only about 70 pounds? It's true -- if you're travelling up country. The *Pullman Hotel* in Khon Kaen is the best place to stay in the Northeast → **p. 58**

INSIDER TIP ▶ **Eat like the gods**

Delectable dishes from different culinary worlds are served in the trendy restaurant *Mantra* in Pataya. The food is as heavenly as the name implies → **p. 71**

INSIDER TIP ▶ **A piece of China amid in the tea plantations**

Mae Salong in Northern Thailand is home to descendants of the Chinese, who once fled from Mao's army. A cool breeze blows over the coffee and tea plantations (photo below) → **p. 52**

INSIDER TIP ▶ **Travel back in time**

History buffs will find just what they are looking for at the *National Museum* in Bang Chiang. Learn all about Thailand's first high civilization from over 3,500 years ago → **p. 63**

INSIDER TIP ▶ **Temple of three cultures**

The *Wat Wang Wiwekaram* in Sangklaburi combines Indian, Burmese and Thai styles to create a masterpiece of temple architecture → **p. 43**



BEST OF...

GREAT PLACES FOR FREE

Discover new places and save money

● *The nightly enchantment of ruins*

No admission is charged for the central area of the *Old Sukhothai* temple on weekdays and Sundays after 6pm. As an added bonus, the lighting makes the place seem all the more mystical at night → p. 45

● *Traverse a mangrove swamp on foot*

Why not save the cost of hiring a longtail boat: in Krabi Town you can walk along the boardwalk of the *Mangrove Forest Walkway* and see nature up close: mudspringers, monitor lizards and crabs → p. 86

● *Loge seat with a view of the sea*

At Cape Promthep on Phuket, hundreds gather every evening to watch the legendary sunsets. The best views are from the *lighthouse*, which doesn't charge an admission fee → p. 88

● *Temple by the lake*

Palm trees on a lily pond and two ornate temples that you can visit for free: *Wat Chong Klang* and *Wat Chong Kham* in Mae Hong Son could easily be the setting for an oriental fairytale (photo) → p. 53

● *Phra Nang cave phallic shrine*

On the neighbouring beaches of Railay in Krabi, there are two exceptional caves – and the more bizarre one is free. In *Phra Nang Cave*, hundreds of wooden phalluses stand surrounding a shrine → p. 86

● *The view from the summit of the sublime*

Most places in Thailand frequented by tourists charge admission to see Buddha. But, you can admire the *Big Buddha* on Phuket at no cost and the spectacular view is free, too! → p. 88

● *A charming array of temples*

As you walk through the historic part of Chiang Mai, you will come across a temple every few minutes that is open to the public for free, including the impressive *Wat Chedi Luang* as well as the *Wat Chiang Man* and the legendary *Wat Phra Singh* → p. 46

● ● ● Dots in guidebook refer to "Best of..." tips

ONLY IN THAILAND

Unique experiences

● *Water fight!*

If you don't like water, then avoid the Thai New Year festival, *Songkran*. During this "water festival" nobody can escape as revellers soak each other with water pistols, hoses, buckets and bowls. It's all great fun – especially in Chiang Mai in northern Thailand (photo) → p. 112

● *A house for ghosts*

Even the spirits need a home so they don't go out making mischief. So the Thais build little shrines for them, where they leave them offerings. The most famous spirit house in Thailand is the *Erawan Shrine* in Bangkok → p. 22

● *Transvestite shows*

Nowhere else on earth has such flamboyant transvestite shows as Thailand, complete with their troupes of ladyboys (*kratoei*). There costume play is especially spectacularly staged by *Tiffany's Show* in Pattaya → p. 72

● *Fighting with fists and feet*

Thai boxing is an action-packed sport, involving the use not only of fists but also elbows, knees and feet. The excitement in the ring is matched by the atmosphere in the crowd. The best boxers show off their talents at the *New Lumpinee Boxing Stadium* in Bangkok → p. 24

● *Islands in their thousands*

Thailand boasts more islands with gorgeous sandy beaches than anywhere else in Southeast Asia. Whether you're seeking excitement or relaxation, you're bound to find it either in the Gulf of Thailand or the Andaman Sea. A particular unspoiled piece of paradise is *Ko Jum*, where you sometimes encounter more monkeys than tourists on the beach → p. 82

● *Nights of culinary delights*

When night falls, Thailand is aflame! Every night in the cities you hear gas cookers hissing and see charcoal fires glowing. Food stalls at night markets prepare snacks and entire meals, and they're good places to sample regional specialities – such as the grilled locusts at the *night market* in *Khon Kaen* → p. 57



ONLY IN

DISCOVERY TOURS



1

THAILAND AT A GLANCE



START: ① Phuket Town
END: ⑬ Mae Sai

Distance:
→ 2,840 km/1,765 miles

19 days
Driving time
(without stops)
50 hours



COSTS: approx. 2,700 euros for 2 people (accommodation, food & drink, rental car, petrol and guided excursions)

WHAT TO PACK: navigation system or smartphone with GPS, swim gear, sun protection and mosquito repellent/nets

Experience the many different facets of Thailand on this cleverly devised route from south to north. Leaving touristy Phuket behind, you'll visit breathtaking natural highlights, amazing beaches and a royal residence before coming to the

Every corner of the earth has its own special charm. If you want to explore all the many different facets of this region, head off the beaten track or get tips for the best stops, breathtaking views, hand-picked restaurants or the best local activities, then these customised discovery tours are just the right thing. Choose the best route for the day and follow in the footsteps of the MARCO POLO authors – well-prepared to navigate your way to all the many highlights that await you along the tour.

metropolis of Bangkok with the royal palace and the best shopping in all of South-east Asia. Travel through former royal cities further to the north of the country where charming temples and spectacular mountain ranges will cast you under their spell.

Your tour begins with two days on ① **Phuket** → p. 88. Thailand's most beloved holiday island not only has an international airport serviced by all the major car rental agencies, but also a dozen amazing beaches worth writing home about. After exploring the fascinating old cen-

DAY 1–2

① Phuket

