TOUR CODE

11F

ADVENTURESABROAD

THAILAND FAMILY TOUR

Hill Tribes & Elephants

11 days

Updated 29/04/2013

Day 1 *Arrival*

Arrive in Bangkok, Thailand.

Overnight in Bangkok. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Bangkok: City Tour*

The epitome of a modern Asian city, Bangkok is a great introduction to Thai culture, history, art and religion. Here we will have the opportunity to explore the rich treasures within the riverfront temples and palaces and wander through the active markets and streets.

After lunch we visit the National Museum, the largest museum in Southeast Asia. The collection of Thai art and various styles within the different galleries is truly exceptional. As Thailand's capital has previously been Ayutthaya and Sukhothai, you will be brought back to different periods through the assortment of arts and artifacts. The nucleus of the collection was first put on show in 1874 and was organized seriously as a national collection in 1933. The museum is housed in several different buildings, themselves fine examples of Thai architecture.

Overnight in Bangkok. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Bangkok - Chiang Mai*

Today we fly to Chiang Mai. Founded in the 13th century, Chiang Mai is a treasure trove of history, religion, culture and art. Currently a flourishing cultural and economic center, it is a city in transition. Thai, Burmese, Lao and hill tribe cultural influences reflect an exotic blend of styles and traditions.

Upon arrival we tour some of the local highlights, including the City Temple, local market, and the seldom visited ruins of Viang Khum Kaam, considered to be the ancient city on which Chiang Mai was built.

This evening we will transfer in a convoy of tuk tuks (a noisy and wonderfully colourful three-wheeled conveyance) to enjoy a traditional Northern Thai Kantoke dinner followed by folk dancing.

Overnight in Chiang Mai. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Chiang Mai: City Tour*

We begin our tour of Chiang Mai's ancient temples and ruins including the famous Phrah That Doi Suthep temple, the landmark of Chiang Mai. Doi Suthep, which dominates the skyline to the west of Chiang Mai, is characterized by the eagles-nest temple of Wat Phra That Doi Suthep. This is Northern Thailand's holiest shrine and one of Thailand's most

important place of pilgrimage. The white elephant that carried a Buddha relic to Wat Suan Dok is said to have fallen and died on this spot. From the road where jade and ivory factory showrooms do a roaring trade, a 300-step staircase, flanked by a pair of huge nagas, leads to the top. We also visit the Hill Tribe Ethnographic Museum.

Our afternoon is free to enjoy this area's comprehensive selection of Thai crafts, from world famous silk to the impressive lacquerware and woodcarving. This evening, after dinner, we will enjoy a visit to Chiang Mai's famous Night Bazaar.

Overnight in Chiang Mai. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Chiang Mai - Trek to Karen Village*

The most intriguing aspect of this area of Thailand is the abundance of Hill Tribes, most of which have been living a lifestyle virtually unchanged for centuries. Our trekking is reasonably easy, and can be achieved by most people of reasonable fitness. Generally we trek for about 2-3 hours per day, encountering both gradual slopes and hills. We try to keep our trek to a somewhat free form style as we prefer to modify the speed and difficulty of the trek according to the needs of the specific group. Sleeping bags are needed for the trek. The accommodation is "dormitory" style, and is simple but clean. The trek provides the perfect opportunity to really meet the fascinating people of this area.

After breakfast we leave Chiang Mai by pick up truck or jeep and drive through the hills to the market at Mae Malai. We continue for another 1.5 hour to an Akha village. There are approximately 20,000 Akha living in Thailand's northern provinces of Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai at high altitudes. This tribe originates in Tibet. Every Akha village is distinguished by its carved wooden gates, presided over by guardian spirits. They live on marginal land and find it difficult to eke out a living through their slash and burn method of agriculture. In order to supplement their income, many Akha are now selling handicrafts, employing the traditional skills used in making their own clothing and cultural items.

We begin our 2 hour hike to a Karen village for a visit, and then finish our day at another Karen village. The Karen are the largest hilltribe group in Northern Thailand. Karen villages don't move their location often, and many villages have been in the same place for hundreds of years. Tonight you will have a chance to witness life in a Karen home and maybe even help out with dinner!

Overnight in a Karen village. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 6 *Trek: Elephant Ride & Lahu Village*

After a hearty breakfast we hike for 2 hours to Elephant Camp where we enjoy a memorable elephant ride for about 1.5 hours while we absorb the beautiful natural scenery through the jungle.

We then trek to visit the Lahu tribe, about 30 minutes. The Lahu are related to the Lolo of Tibet who migrated through China and Myanmar to settle in Thailand about 50 years ago.

Overnight in a Lahu village. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 7 *Lahu Village - Rafting to Shan Village - Chiang Mai*

Up with the roosters to the aroma of cooking rice and the welcome sun breaking through mists over the hills.

After breakfast we get ready for an adventurous bamboo rafting from our Lahu village to a Shan village for about 2 to 3 hours. The Shans are considered among the earliest inhabitants of this region of Thailand and so their way of living is much like that of northern lowland Thais. We lunch at the Shan village, after which we drive by truck to visit a waterfall, possibly for a swim and some relaxation, prior to returning to Chiang Mai.

Overnight in Chiang Mai. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 8 *Chiang Mai - Paduang & Meo Hill Tribes - Golden Triangle - Chiang Rai*

We depart Chiang Mai by overland journey to Tha Ton to visit the Karen Paduang ("Long Neck") and Meo Hill tribes. The Paduang are refugees from Burma. Originally semi-nomadic farmers in the jungle, they now rely for income from the sale of handicrafts and donations from visitors. The women wear striking clothing and the striking neck rings from which the name derives.

The Meo, also called the Hmongs, are spread around the mountains in the northern most provinces of Thailand. The term "Meo" has become a sort of collective name Thai people use for describing the hill tribe people in general. Like other hill tribe people, they have their own set of beliefs in spirituality and nature.

We continue our journey to the Golden Triangle with a visit to the Laos and Myanmar border before arriving in Chiang Rai.

Overnight in Chiang Rai. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 9 *Chiang Rai - Overnight train*

We have a city tour of Chiang Rai before transferring back to Chian Mao in time to catch the overnight, air-conditioned train to Bangkok (FIRST CLASS).

The Kingdom of Thailand has a very good inter-provincial rail system. It is a comfortable way to travel for Thai's and visitors alike, with room you can enjoy the passing scenery of small villages, farmland, and old temples.

NOTE: single compartments NOT available; single supplements reflect sharing for this one night.

Overnight train. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Bangkok*

This morning we arrive in Bangkok with the balance of the day free.

Overnight in Bangkok. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Depart*

Departure from Bangkok.

BON VOYAGE!! Meal plan: Breakfast.