TOUR CODE

XTH

ADVENTURESABROAD

THAILAND ACTIVE ADVENTURE

with Village-to-Village Trekking

12 days

Updated 09/02/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in Bangkok*

Arrive in Bangkok, Thailand.

Overnight in Bangkok (airport area). Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Bangkok: City Tour*

This morning we will visit the Grand Palace situated on the Chao Phraya River. Started in 1782, the complex is a collection of buildings covering over 1.5 sq km (0.9 sq mile). Within the grounds we visit Wat Phra Kaeo, known for the venerated Emerald Buddha. Sitting on a golden altar, it is carved from green jade and is only 75 cm (30 inches) high! Since its discovery in the 15th Century, the Emerald Buddha has known many homes, including Lampang, Chiang Rai and two locations in Laos, Luang Prabang and Vientiane.

We will start our afternoon with a visit to Wat Pho also known as the Temple of the Reclining Buddha. The temple is the largest in Bangkok and it is 200 years old. On its grounds, we will see the tremendous 46m (150 foot) long, 15 m (49 foot) high gold-plated reclining Buddha. The sole of his feet have detailed work of mother-of-pearl. Wat Pho also has more than 1,000 bronze images from Ayutthaya and Sukhothai rescued by Rama I's brother.

We will continue our day by crossing the "khlong" (river) by boat in order to visit Wat Arun, or the Temple of the Dawn. It was built in the early 19th Century and its tower is the highest in Thailand measuring 81m (265 feet). The tower, or "prang," is covered with pieces of Chinese porcelain and its beauty is appreciated from a distance. The temple gained its name from the Indian god of dawn, Aruna. Here there are superb statues of the Buddha at the most important stages of his life: at birth (north), in meditation (east), preaching his first sermon (south) and entering Nirvana (west).

Overnight in Bangkok. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Bangkok - Pitsanolok - Sukhothai - Chiang Mai*

Today we fly to Pitsanolok, the birthplace of King Naresuan the Great of Ayuthaya (reign: AD 1590-1605), and his brother Prince Ekathosarot. Phitsanulok has long been an important center for political and strategic reasons, and a major center of recruitment when Ayuthaya waged war with Burma. It was the capital of Thailand for 25 years during the 1448-1488 reign of Ayuthayaos King Boromtrailokanat.

On arrival, we are met by our bus and begin our sightseeing, including the monastery of Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat, commonly called by the inhabitants as "Wat Yai." This is the most important monastery of Pitsanulok, located at the foot of Naresuan Bridge on the city side of the river. The monastery was built in the reign of Phra Maha Thamma Racha I (Phraya Lithai) In AD 1357. It houses the Phra Buddha Chinnarat regarded as the most beautiful Buddha image in Thailand.

We continue to Sukhothai where we visit the Ramkhamhueng National Museum, an excellent introduction to the historic city, including much in the Sukhothai style. From here we proceed to Wat Mahatat, dominated by a 14th Century lotus-bud tower and encircled by a moat. Some of the best architectural ornamentation is found in the main tower. We also visit the remains of the Royal Palace.

We continue to Chiang Mai, arriving late afternoon.

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 *Bangkok - Ayuthaya - Bangkok*

Today we travel to Ayuthaya, capital city of Thailand from 1350 to 1767. During this period Thai culture flourished and so did international relations with the Dutch, French, Portuguese, Japanese and Chinese. Ayuthaya is in the middle of the Pasak River and boasts uncountable ancient temples, monuments, ruins and stupas. The Ayuthaya Historical Park is a UNESCO declared World Heritage site. In 1767, the Burnese Army sacked and burnt down Ayuthaya to complete ruins. Although it suffered a great destruction, Ayuthaya is still a very attractive ancient city to visit. A highlights of this trip: The Royal Grand Palace, which was built by King Trilokanart (1448-1488) and was added at later reigns. The royal palace has only its ruined foundations and partial remains of the many great splendid halls and walls.

Other attractions in Ayuthaya that we incorporate as part of our tour are the Bang Pa In-Summer Palace, the famous summer palace of the royal family where different buildings reveal different architectural designs, such as Thai, Italian, and Chinese; and Wat Mahatha. It is said that a holy relic of The Lord Buddha was enshrined here though historians cannot tell who built this temple. It is believed that either the second king or the fourth king of Ayuthaya may have built it.

Overnight in Bangkok. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Depart*

Departure from Bangkok.

BON VOYAGE!! Meal plan: Breakfast.