

# 7 Things Every Tourist Must Do When Visiting Chiang Mai



One of the tribes in Baan Tong Luang, Chiang Mai

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Chiang Mai, nestled in the hills of Northern Thailand, is well-known for culture, charm, tribes, *wats* (Buddhist temples), markets and its cool climate. It's easily reachable from Singapore and is an ideal place for a long weekend or extended break. Here are some of the key things to do.

## 1. Experience an Elephant Camp

There are dozens of places to see domesticated elephants in Thailand but finding the right one can be challenging. The [Thai Elephant Conservation Centre](#) at Lampang is owned by the government and has great reviews. Get there early, because watching the elephants bathe is one of the highlights of a visit. The young calves are adorable and the location superb. Make sure you visit the nursery, elephant hospital and dung paper factory too!



## 2. Visit a tribal village

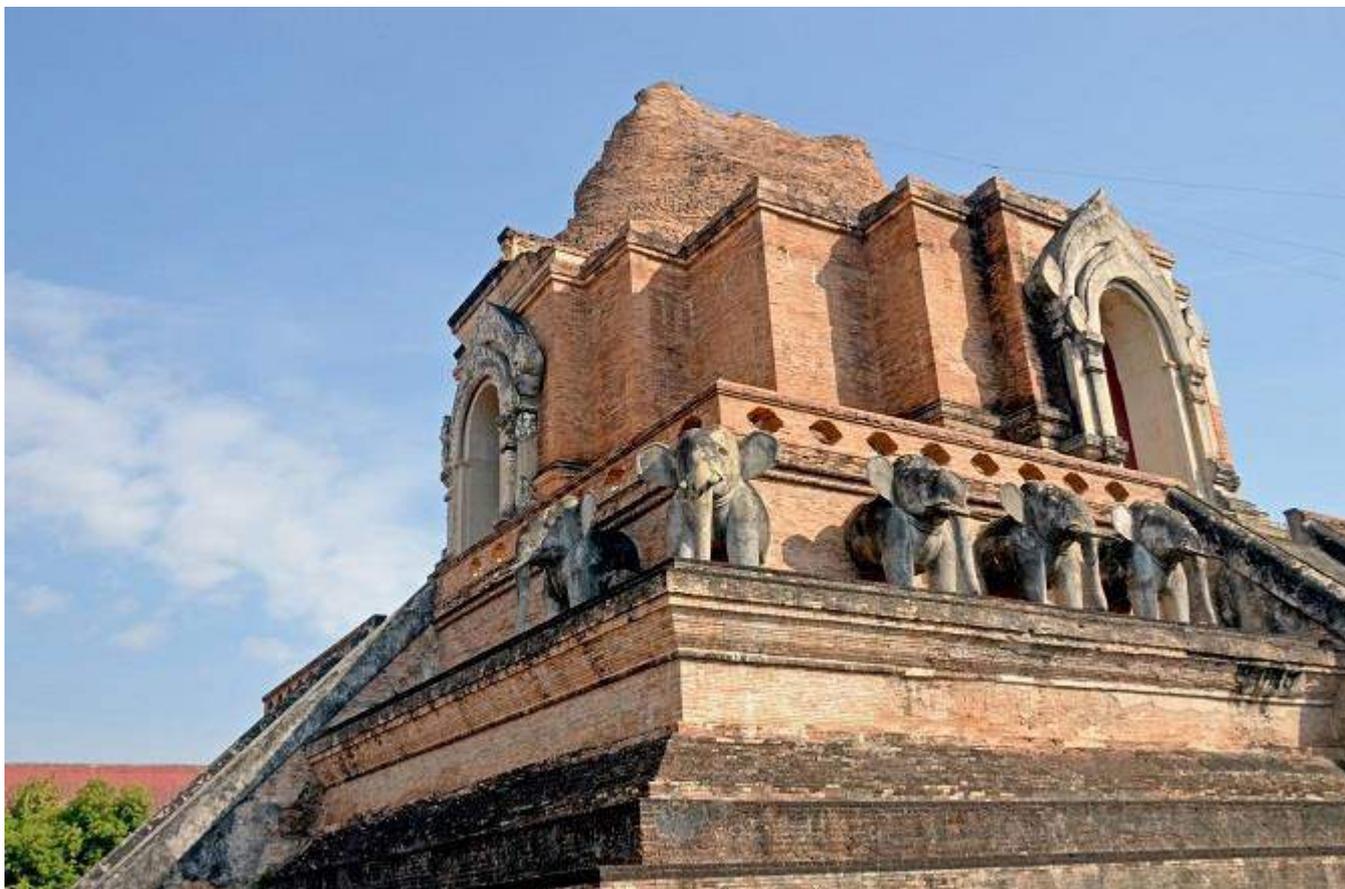
The tribal village of Baan Tong Luang is a very unique place and will affect your emotions in many different ways. There is a cluster of seven small tribal villages including the famous long neck women, the Lahu "big ears" tribe and Kayaw Karen. Many are refugees who have moved here from difficult situations in their native countries.



You pay 500 Baht (~S\$19.50) to enter and get the chance to take photos of the people, see them in a "natural environment" and buy their goods. They are very friendly, and will even invite you to their homes!

### **3. Take a tour of the Old City**

The old city of Chiang Mai can easily be toured on foot or using local taxis and *tuk tuks* (rickshaws). There are dozens of *wats* but I recommend you limit yourself to a few of the most important including Wat Chedi Luang, Wat Phra Singh and Wat Chiang Man. Dash Teak House, a Thai restaurant run by a Cordon Bleu certified chef, is fantastic for dinner, but do book because this upmarket restaurant is always full. If you are there over a weekend, the Sunday Walking Street Market is crowded, chaotic and fun.



### **4. Shop markets, handicraft villages, and more**

Most Singaporeans love to shop. Chiang Mai has a world-famous night market which is a must-visit, and bustling local establishments such as Warorot Market, the largest fresh food market in the city. Cottage industries have been creating handicrafts in Chiang Mai for generations and the easiest way to witness this for yourself - think celadon, silver, Thai silk and umbrella making - is to take a thirty minute taxi to Sankampaeng Handicraft Village. The quality is high and prices are reasonable.



## 5. Have your head in the clouds

The highest point in Thailand is in the Doi Inthanon National Park at 2,565 meters above sea level. The temperature is about 10-12 degrees celcius on average, and gets even chillier in winter, so wrap up well for the short nature walk at the summit. On the way down, stop at the King and Queen Pagodas which were built by the Royal Thai Air Force to commemorate the king and queens 60th birthdays. The gardens and views are spectacular.



If it is a warm day, stop at the so-called "Grand Canyon", a scenic former quarry, on your journey back to Chang Mai. The place is popular with backpackers who swim and jump into the lake from the vertical cliffs. I preferred to watch from the café and let others do the daredevil deeds.



## 6. Venture out to Doi Suthep Mountain

Wat Phra That Buddhist Temple on Doi Suthep Mountain, a sacred site for many Thai people, is about 30 minutes from Chiang Mai and well worth a visit. The Naga Serpent Stair Case, golden spire and historic murals and shrines are sure to impress and you can see for miles from the viewpoint. If you have time, travel to the nearby Bhubing Palace for a peaceful stroll in beautiful gardens. Continue to Doi Pui Hmong Village where about 1,000 Hmong people live. It is rather commercialised but great fun for people-watching and souvenir buying.

## 7. Feast!

I love Thai food, and Chiang Mai has some of the best. Without a shadow of a doubt, my mango sticky rice was the best dish I tasted all trip. It was so yummy!



Chiang Mai certainly has a broad range of attractions and is apparently a great city to live in too! Infrastructure and shopping are good and there is something for all the family.

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British-born Singapore Permanent Resident Mike Smith is a travel writer, blogger and photographer who has had articles published in numerous local and international magazines. He owns [AsiaPhotoStock.com](http://AsiaPhotoStock.com), an online stock photo library, and you can follow his blog at [asiaphotostock.blogspot.sg](http://asiaphotostock.blogspot.sg) where he gives honest opinions about the many places he has traveled to.

