



Smiling Albino's
History, Art, Design & Culture
in the Emerald Triangle

Thailand, Laos & Cambodia



Background



The CEO of a large American corporation and his extended family of eight take an educational trip together once every year. He contacted Joe Cummings (<http://www.joecummings.com>), long time author of Lonely Planet's Thailand, Myanmar and Lao guidebooks, to design a custom trip with a focus on art, history and special emphasis on galleries and artefacts. Joe proposed an initial itinerary, then consulted Smiling Albino for tweaking and execution of the journey.

**Day 1:
Welcome to 'Land of
Smiles'**



[Chakrabongse Royal Villas](#)

Upon your arrival in an airport representative will meet you directly from the aircraft and speed you through Thai Customs, then to a private vehicle which will escort you the Chakrabongse Villas. Enjoy the evening to settle into your surroundings, enjoy a swim and get ready for your adventure.



About the Chakrabongse Villa

Chakrabongse Villa is set on the banks of the Chao Phraya River in the heart of Old Bangkok. Within this tranquil location, visitors escape the hustle of modern-day Bangkok, while being intimately close to premier attractions. The Villas were built in 1908 by His Royal Highness Prince Chakrabongse and the home was used for royal ceremonies along the river. It's been a vestige of the kingdom for generations and a stay here is an affirming and exclusive experience.

**Day 2:
Bangkok High Culture:
classic homes and
museums**



Meals: B, L,D
[Chakrabongse Royal Villas](#)

Bangkok is home to many museums, historical sites and a vanishing number of beautiful traditional Thai homes. This exploration delves into three prime sites, ideal for gaining an understanding of Thai design, architecture, history and culture.

Home of M.R. Kukrit Pramoj

Considered a cultural magnate of Thailand, M.R. Kukrit, a former Thai Prime Minister, almost single-handedly revived traditional 'Khon' (masked dance) art and culture. A renaissance man who brought art back into mainstream Thai life, he died in 1995. His home is a treasure trove of Thai art, history and a testament to traditional aristocratic Thai lifestyle.

Jim Thompson's House

A must for any enthusiast of regional art, classical Thai home design and the legacy of this Thai silk magnate, his home is a vestibule of artistic treasures and mystery. A pioneer who revolutionized the Thai silk trade, Thompson disappeared mysteriously in Malaysia in the 1960's and has been a source of controversy and legend ever since. His home remains a spectacular artistic tribute to his empire.

National Museum

Thailand's National Museum contains one of the best documented chronologies of prehistoric, Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, and Rattanakosin-era events and figures. Showcasing the kingdom's finest treasures, including the first stone inscriptions of Thai writing, art enthusiasts often make the journey for the Buddhaisawan Chapel alone, which houses one of Thailand's most revered Buddha images, Phra Buddhasihing.

**Day 3:
Royal Bangkok**



Meals: B, L
[Chakrabongse Royal Villas](#)

A long time resident of Wat Pho, Bangkok's largest and oldest temple will lead you on an educational exploration of this spectacular site. Of particular importance are the mother-of-pearl inlaid murals at the feet of the Reclining Buddha. Your host will also provide an explanation of stone slabs with Sanskrit inscriptions which form the basis for traditional Thai therapeutic massage. From here you'll visit the kingdom's premier attraction, Wat Phra Kaew (Grand Palace), gaining exclusive entrance into some private chapels with its chief custodian. Lunch will be enjoyed along the river at one of our favourite Thai 'haunts', then we'll venture to one or two more temples depending on group interest. What a day!

**Day 4:
Meet the Professor**



Meals: B, D
[Chakrabongse Royal Villas](#)

Enjoy the day as you wish with a Smiling Albino host on-call. Tonight one of Thailand's most distinguished professors of Asian history and art from a prominent Bangkok university will host you at dinner. Over the course of an incredible feast 'The Professor' will lead a discussion about the development of Thai art with an emphasis on oil mural paintings and the current efforts to restore and conserve this skill. Tonight is your final night at the Chakrabongse Villas.

Days 5: To Laos



Meals: B
[Maison Souvannaphoum](#)

After a morning flight from Bangkok you'll be met by your Luang Prabang host and transferred to the storied Maison Souvannaphoum, once home to Crown Prince Souvannaphouma before Laos fell to the communists in the 1970's. After settling in, you'll explore this enchanting heritage city by foot, first taking in Wat Visounnarath, the oldest operating temple in Luang Prabang, followed by Wat Xieng Thong, perhaps the most famous temple in Laos.

For dinner tonight we suggest L' Elephant', the top French-Lao restaurant in the city.



About the Maison Souvannaphoum

A superb example of French-Lao colonial architecture, Maison Souvannaphoum is a masterpiece boutique hotel in every sense. As the former royal residence of Prince Souvannaphouma, it has recently been restored to its former glory. The property is equipped with a spa, elegantly-designed rooms, tranquil gardens and superb restaurant. A tastefully situated pool and deck-lounge accentuate this brilliant colonial property.

Day 6-7: About Town



Meals: B, D (Royal Lao Dinner on Day 7)
Maison Souvannaphoum

Enjoy the next couple of days learning, exploring and meeting interesting characters. We suggest following the monks on their early morning alms-round (06:00), visiting the former Royal Palace, now the National Museum, experiencing the weaving village of Ban Phanom, then Kuang Si and Tat Sae waterfalls plus nearby villages.

A resident expat and local historian who is also the pioneer of Luang Prabang's second largest industry, 'saa' paper product development, will host you at his home to experience a 'Royal Lao Dinner' prepared by the city's finest chefs.

**Day 8:
To Chiang Mai**



Meals: B, D
[The Rachamankha](#)

Enjoy the morning at your leisure before your noon flight to Chiang Mai, after which you'll check-in to the Rachamankha.

At 16:00 Mr. Joe Cummings, author and historian, will take you to the city's premier temple Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, perched atop the area's largest mountain. You'll enjoy sunset and a thoughtful introduction to the city.

Tonight Joe will host you to an authentic northern Thai feast aboard a boat cruising the city's moat and lead a topical discussion.



About The Rachamankha

A true boutique hotel, the 24-room Rachamankha is an inspired property designed in the style of a Lanna temple, where aromatic frangipani trees line Sino-Thai style courtyards which reveal exquisite antiques. Designed by an established Thai architect and interior designer, the rooms feature solid wooden doors, four-poster beds, bamboo jalousies, and woven-reed mats.

**Days 9–10:
Architecture, Art
Galleries and Essential
Northern Handicrafts**



Meals: B daily
[The Rachamankha](#)

On Day 9 over breakfast, Joe will discuss the concept of northern Thailand as the birthplace of Thai cultural and national identity, with ‘Lanna’ as a focus. He’ll also explore themes of Buddhism and Chiang Mai’s connection with Sri Lanka, the centuries-old caravan trade and the focus of craftsmanship in Chiang Mai, leading up to the gradual rebirth of regional identity in the area and the reinterpretation of traditional arts, architecture and crafts in new and exciting forms today.

This afternoon you’ll travel to a rarely visited temple, Wat Ton Kwen, the last ‘wat’ (temple) still in traditional layout. A total absence of foreign visitors results in a very exclusive experience.

From here you’ll move on to the ‘Wat Ket’ neighbourhood to take in the vernacular architecture along Charoen Rat Road, including the old tobacco monopoly regional headquarters and Sino-Anglo shop houses.

Gallery Visits

During your time in Chiang Mai you’ll also be accompanied by a local to lead you through an explanation of pieces available at the city’s most important galleries. Your visits will include: **Gong Dee Gallery** (contemporary art and unique furniture designs) and **Sop Moei** (original, contemporary handicrafts from a single Karen village on the Thai-Myanmar border) and **La Luna Gallery** (contemporary easel art from Thailand and Myanmar), among others.

Additional suggested outing on Day 9 or 10

Enjoy lunch in Lampang, followed by a visit to Wat Phra That Lampang Luang, a magnificent 15th century Lanna monastery containing the oldest wooden Buddha chapel in Thailand. On the way back to Chiang Mai stop in Lamphun to see Wat Phra That Hariphunchai and Wat Chama Thewi, two of northern Thailand’s most important pre-Lanna temples.

**Day 11:
Sukhothai: Thai
Beginnings**



Meals: B
[Ananda Museum Gallery Hotel](#)

Today you'll take a mid-day fly to Sukhothai, the kingdom's ancient capital, and transfer to the Ananda Museum Gallery Hotel. You may wish to venture out on your own tonight to see some of the temples which are beautifully illuminated.



About Ananda Museum Gallery Hotel

Ananda Museum Gallery Hotel is not only a thoughtfully designed hotel but also an active gallery featuring area ceramics and glassware. This property provides the perfect comforts blended with design.

**Days 13-14:
Explore Sukhothai**



Meals: B daily
[Ananda Museum Gallery Hotel](#)

Nowadays, Thai people view Sukhothai as the cradle of the Thai nation as it was the capital of the Sukhothai Kingdom (1238-1438). Sukhothai translates to 'Dawn of Happiness' and was founded by two Thai chieftains who declared independence from the great Khmer empire. The inception of the first Sukhothai King in 1238 traditionally marks the founding of the modern Thai nation. The old capital – 10km outside of New Sukhothai – is in ruins and located in a 800-acre historical park.

Today you'll walk the grounds of the Sukhothai Historic Park with a member of the restoration project, and visit the Ramkhamhaeng National Museum, which offers a comprehensive look at life during the Sukhothai era through the sculptures and antiquities on display.

**Day 15:
To Cambodia**



Meals: B
[Raffles Hotel Le Royal](#)

In the morning you'll shuttle to the airport to journey to Phnom Penh, Cambodia via Bangkok. Upon arrival at Phnom Penh you'll be met by our Team and transferred to colonial Raffles Hotel Le Royal.

Tonight Nick Ray, author of Lonely Planet's Cambodia guidebook will host you for dinner, introducing you to the country, its storied history and your time here.



About Raffles Hotel Le Royal

Raffles Hotel Le Royal is the premier hotel in Phnom Penh with those rare attributes of history and style. It was first established in 1929, and in its early heyday enjoyed an international clientele comprising globetrotters and adventurers, writers and journalists, royalty and dignitaries. Reopened in 1997, the grand hotel fulfills all the requirements of a modern world-class hotel with its facilities and amenities, but imparts an old-world charm through its style and decor, which is elegant yet comfortable, classic yet casual.

**Days 16-17:
A Captivating Capital**



Meals: B daily
[Raffles Hotel Le Royal](#)

Although you'll have been to other museums in Thailand and Laos already, don't neglect a visit to Phnom Penh's National Museum which has had the benefit of major assistance from American and European curators and art restorers. It is indeed one of SE Asia's best. You'll also take a sobering look into the kingdom's Khmer Rouge past, visiting The Killing Fields and notorious S21 Prison.

Other suggested stops include the city's two famous markets, the 1935-vintage, art-deco Psar Thmei (Central Market) and Psar Toul Tom Pong (Russian Market), where bargains are to be had. At least one night should be devoted to dining on the river and make sure you visit 'Malis' which serves perhaps the finest Cambodian cuisine in the capital.

Lonely Planet author Mr. Nick Ray will host you during your time in the capital, leading topical discussions and making the most of your Phnom Penh experience.

**Day 18:
To Siem Reap**



Meals: B
[La Residence d'Angkor](#)

Enjoy the morning at your leisure then you'll catch an early afternoon flight to Siem Reap. Upon arrival you'll be met by our Team and escorted to the ultra-chic Hotel de la Paix. Enjoy the rest of the day to relax and prepare for tomorrow's exploration of the Angkor area. If you're interested we'll arrange a sundown visit to Angkor's largest temple, uncork the champagne and celebrate your arrival in style!



About La Residence d'Angkor

An Orient Express property, La Residence is one of Siem Reap's most desired addresses. An intimate luxury hotel, rich woods, Khmer art and artefacts create a gorgeous environment. Ideally located near the town's prime sites and a short journey to the temples of Angkor, this is a great resort to call home.

Days 19-20: Angkor Wat



Meals: B, L, D
[La Residence d'Angkor](#)

Regarded as one of the Great Wonders of the World, Angkor Wat is the world's largest temple complex. Its magnitude and artistic significance are unparalleled. This vast city was once the most important and powerful in the region, serving as the Khmer capital for over 600 years. The primary complexes of Angkor Wat, Angkor Tom and Tha Prom are considered the finest and most significant of all the Khmer ruins.

The Khmers had long ago perfected the art of carving both statues and bas-reliefs in wood, and they transferred this art into stone between the 7th and 9th centuries. Hindu gods were often the subject of these carvings and stories from the great Hindu epics, particularly the Mahabharata and the Ramayana were brilliantly portrayed in bas-relief carvings on the walls of the Khmer temples which you'll see around Siem Reap. After a great Khmer lunch you'll continue your exploration with visits to Preah Khan, Neak Pean and Ta Som temples. We'll then tuck into East Mebon and climb up for a stunning view at Pre Rup for a private sunset with fine wine and cheese.

Tonight we'll treat you to dinner at the city's top Khmer restaurant.

**Day 20:
The Mother of all
Temples**



Meals: B, L
[La Residence d'Angkor](#)

Dedicated to Hindu god Vishnu, Angkor Wat is the greatest architectural achievement of the Angkor period. Using bicycle, private car or a combination of both, we'll head to Angkor's main sites as well as Angkor Thom, Bayon and the rooted, overgrown Tha Phrom, which many deem to be the most enigmatic and charming of all Angkor temples. Enjoy your final dinner as you wish.

**Day 21:
Homeward Bound**



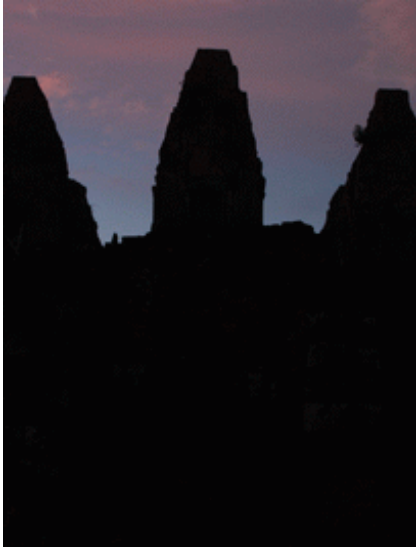
Meals: B

Today you'll be transferred to the airport and fly to Bangkok to connect to your flight home. Thank you for adventuring with us and we hope you remember your tri-nation, SE Asian traveling epic for many years to come. Until next time!

Price: Approx. \$450US/pp/day

INCLUDING:

This program includes all the sensible things like 20 nights of premium accommodations, all regional (SE Asia) flights, all transfers, all admissions, meals as indicated, snacks, noted scholars and writers, Thai, Lao, Khmer and Western hosts, professional client care, a mobile phone and personalized 'Adventure Kits'.



The Smiling Albino Service Difference

We understand implicitly that a perfect adventure is much more than nice hotels, great meals and hassle-free logistics. For a travel experience to be perfect, all pieces must work together like a symphony. It is the fine details which our guests appreciate most, like cold face towels after a hike, electrolyte beverages for your day cycling, and wine uncorked when the moment is right. From local maps to bottled water and colorful anecdotes on the areas we visit, a Smiling Albino adventure is a thorough, intimately hosted experience. We will also provide you with a complimentary mobile phone for your use throughout your stay. You'll be treated with executive care during your Smiling Albino adventure.

We look forward to hosting you!

The Team at Smiling Albino

Smiling Albino - Bangkok, Thailand

info@smilingalbino.com - www.smilingalbino.com

Ph: 662-718-9561, 1-877-THAI-WAY

Fx: 662-718-9562

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