



## How to Spend 24 Hours in Chiang Rai

### Stay at the Le Meridien Chiang Rai

We took a late flight from Bangkok to Chiang Rai and checked into the [Le Meridien Resort](#) that night.

We were impressed with the hotel from the minute we first stepped into the beautiful open-air lobby. This peaceful 5-star property is perched on the edge of the Kok River and perfectly blends modern luxury with natural beauty.

Although it is a luxury resort, it does not come with the luxury price tag! We were shocked that rooms started at only \$100 per night during our stay. Of course, prices do fluctuate depending on when you visit. We were there during the rainy off-season.

We thought that the rooms were spacious and clean, the service was exceptionally friendly, the grounds were perfectly manicured, the location was great, and the food was utterly delicious!

### Breakfast at the Hotel

The next morning, start your day off with breakfast at the hotel. When I think of a hotel continental breakfast, I think of rubbery eggs, dry toast, and questionable sausage. That was not the case at the Le Meridien Resort!

Their continental breakfast was next level with a fresh-pressed juice bar, homemade baked goods, seasonal fruits, made-to-order omelets, and a wide assortment of savory local dishes. There were so many options to choose from, I wanted to try a little taste of every dish!

The breakfast is not included with your room rate (unless you are a Marriott reward member), but it was very reasonably priced at \$15 per person during our stay.

If you prefer to get out and experience a local breakfast, try Chivit Thamma Da Coffee House. This beautiful colonial-style riverside café serves delicious Thai fusion dishes with an amazing ambiance. Try the homemade granola or the Northern Thai-style omelet. This is a popular spot, so make reservations in advance.

## Mid-Day Temple Hopping

Chiang Rai's main attractions are the stunning temples that dot the landscape. You'll want to spend the morning and early afternoon visiting each one. They are all so unique and absolutely gorgeous! The best way to get around is with the Grab app. It works like Uber in the US, but the rides are very inexpensive.

### White Temple (Wat Rong Khun)

Start at Chiang Rai's most iconic landmark, Wat Rong Khun, or the White Temple. This is not your typical Buddhist temple, but instead looks like something out of a fantasy world.

This art masterpiece features an all-white facade and mirrored mosaics that shimmer in the morning light.

The beauty stands in contrast to the somewhat morbid sculptures depicting death and suffering that you'll see as you cross the Bridge of the Cycle of Rebirth.

Crossing the bridge and passing through the Gate of Heaven to the temple is a symbolic journey of passing through life's sufferings to achieve enlightenment.

Once you cross the bridge, you can't go back, but you can wander around the grounds and admire the remarkable intricate details of the temple.

You'll also notice a large and ostentatious gold structure that stands out next to the pure white temple. This symbolizes worldly possessions. Ironically, it houses the public restroom, which accurately portrays their view on worldly desires and money!

The gold building is surrounded by a moat filled with colorful fish. You can purchase fish food, and we thought it was very entertaining to see countless fish fighting for a bite!

There is a small fee to tour the temple grounds, and you must follow the dress code with your shoulders and knees covered.

### Blue Temple (Wat Rong Suea Ten)

Next, head to Wat Rong Suea Ten, or the Blue Temple, just 15 minutes away. This temple is painted a deep sapphire blue with intricate gold trim. Although this temple is smaller than the White Temple, it is equally stunning.

The temple sits on the site of an older abandoned temple that is rumored to have once been overrun by tigers. This led to the name "Rong Suea Ten," which translates to "House of the Dancing Tiger."

Unlike the White Temple, visitors are allowed inside the Blue Temple. Inside the main hall (ubosot), you'll find a massive seated white Buddha that glows beneath beautifully painted ceilings and colorful murals.

Like many Thai temples, the Blue Temple features large Naga, or mythical serpents, flanking the staircases. They represent protection and the path to enlightenment.

This temple is free to visit, and you must adhere to the same modest dress code.

## Wat Huay Pla Kang (Big Buddha Temple)

Wat Huay Pla Kang is a relatively new temple complex that was built in the early 2000s and is located on a hillside just north of central Chiang Rai.

The temple is often referred to by tourists as the "Big Buddha Temple." However, it actually features a towering 9-story statue of Guanyin, the Chinese Goddess of Mercy. She is known as the protector of women and children and plays a central role in both Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions.

For a small fee, you can actually take an elevator up inside the statue to the 25th-floor viewpoint, located behind Guanyin's eyes. From there, you'll get panoramic views of the Chiang Rai countryside.

One of my favorite features of this temple is the massive white mythical dragon serpents (Naga) that guard the staircase leading to the Guanyin statue.

There is also a bright red nine-story pagoda beside the Guanyin statue. This is another example of the blending of Thai and Chinese architectural styles that you'll find throughout the temple complex. The pagoda features images of the Buddha on every level and offers a great view from the top.

The last structure in the complex is the Thai-style Viharn that serves as the main temple building and assembly hall.

## A Few More Temples to Visit if You Have Time:

- **Baan Dam Museum (Black House):** This mysterious sprawling collection of dark wooden buildings is known as the "Black House". It features animal bones, horns, and dramatic wooden structures that explore themes of life, death, and Thai culture.
- **Wat Sai Khao (Fairytale Temple):** This is one of Chiang Rai's most whimsical temples. With pastel hues, playful sculptures, and a dreamlike vibe, it's like stepping into a fantasy land. This temple is less known to tourists, so you may have it all to yourself.
- **Wat Saeng Kaew Phothiyan:** This majestic temple complex is a hidden gem, surrounded by beautifully maintained gardens and filled with intricate statues and colorful murals. It's peaceful, grand, and incredibly photogenic.

## Khao Soi Lunch at Por Jai Restaurant

You can't visit Northern Thailand without trying khao soi! This flavorful coconut curry noodle dish originated in the northern Chiang Mai region and is perfectly spicy, creamy, and delicious.

Our son lived in Thailand for two years, and Khao Soi was his very favorite dish. One of the best places to find Khao Soi in Chiang Rai is at the Por Jai Restaurant near the city center. The restaurant closes at 3:30 pm, so plan accordingly.

Another lunch option is Lalitta Café located near the Big Buddha Temple. This Instagram-famous café looks like it came straight from a fairytale, with mushroom-shaped huts, cascading waterfalls, whimsical décor, and photo ops galore.

After seeing this cafe plastered all over social media, I was planning to go here for lunch. However, the parking lot was full of tour buses, and it looked like a bit of a tourist trap. Instead, we relied on the recommendation of our driver and went to Por Jai for a more local and authentic experience. I think we made the best choice!

## Relaxing Afternoon at the Resort

We were only in Chiang Rai for one full day, but we booked the hotel for 2 nights since we weren't leaving until the next morning.

Since we didn't have to check out early, we were able to go back and spend a relaxing afternoon lounging by the riverside pool and taking a nap in the air-conditioned room.

You can also unwind with a traditional Thai or oil massage at the spa. However, the prices are more expensive at the resort. You can find cheaper deals in town at places like Namwan Thai Massage. From our own experience, the Thai massage is quite intense and a little painful. The oil massage or head/shoulder/back massages are more relaxing.

If you prefer to keep exploring instead of relaxing, try visiting a museum. You can learn about the region's hill tribe cultures at the Hill Tribe Museum or explore artifacts and antiques at the lesser-known Oub Kham Museum. Both offer insight into the rich heritage of northern Thailand.

## Dinner at Lanzhou Noodle

For dinner, head to Lanzhou Noodle, located in the heart of Chiang Rai at 873/5-6 Phaholyothin Rd near Bus Terminal 1 and the Chiang Rai Night Bazaar.

We stumbled across this restaurant and it was one of the best meals we ate on our entire trip!

We were walking by the window of the restaurant and were stopped in our tracks to watch as the noodles were being hand-pulled. We couldn't resist going inside!

The Beef Noodle Soup and Dried Pork Noodles were divine! The broth was rich and flavorful, and the noodles were perfectly chewy. The portions are also large, so you could easily share a few dishes family-style.

## Walking Street Night Market or Chiang Rai Night Bazaar

After dinner, it's time to experience the chaotic sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of a traditional Asian night market!

If you are visiting on a Saturday, you can't miss the Saturday Walking Street Night Market. This lively open-air market is the biggest night market in Chiang Rai.

The market is held every Saturday from 3 pm until 10 pm. It is filled with hundreds of stalls running the length of Thanalai Road. You'll find handmade crafts, clothing, souvenirs, street food, local produce, and live performers.

There are fewer crowds if you go earlier in the day, but many of the stalls don't open until after 5 pm. We also like the vibrant energy of the crowded night market once the sun goes down and the lights come on!

We mostly came for the food and had fun sampling local dishes and even trying the obligatory fried cricket (when in Thailand)! We loved the pad Thai, mango sticky rice, grilled skewers, and banana roti (Thai banana pancake).

We also picked up some vintage clothes and a few souvenirs. You can't go home without some traditional elephant pants!

If you aren't visiting on a Saturday, you can still visit the Chiang Rai Night Bazaar. It isn't as big as the Saturday Night Market, but it will still give you a taste of a traditional Asian night market.

The Night Bazaar is located near Bus Terminal 1 and Lanzhou Noodles, if you are planning to go there for dinner. The Night Bazaar is open daily from 6 pm until 11 pm.

After the night market, we headed back to the hotel and got a good night's sleep before taking an early bus to Chiang Mai the next morning. I would have loved to spend more time in Chiang Rai, but I felt like we were able to see the main sights in one day and experience the beauty and culture that the area has to offer. I hope this guide helps as you plan your trip to Chiang Rai!

