



A Detailed 9 Day Thailand Itinerary

Day 1: Travel to Bangkok

We landed in Bangkok late at night after a long travel day. All we wanted was a hot shower, a soft bed, and a good night's sleep so we could be refreshed for our first day in Thailand.

We booked a room at [Marriott Aloft Bangkok Sukhumvit 11](#) and were happy with the hotel. It was located in a vibrant part of the city within walking distance of popular restaurants and shops. The rooms were clean, comfortable, and modern, and the breakfast spread was amazing!

If your flight arrives earlier in the day, consider swapping part of Day 2 with a half-day trip to the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market and the Maeklong Railway Market.

Day 2: Bangkok

Hop-on Hop-off River Cruise

After a delicious breakfast at the hotel, we used the Grab ride share app to catch a ride to Sathorn Pier. Grab is similar to Uber and Lyft, but the rides are so much cheaper!

At the pier, we purchased a day pass for the [Chao Phraya Tourist Boat](#). This is the public ferry boat that connects to many of Bangkok's main tourist sites. The day pass is inexpensive and allows you to hop on and off the boat to visit the different attractions throughout the day.

Click the link for all of the [attractions](#) you can access from each of the 10 piers, but I'll share the ones we recommend below.

Chinatown

The first stop you'll want to get off at is the Ratchawong Pier, where you can visit Chinatown. This neighborhood has been around for over 100 years and is a maze of sizzling food carts, noodle shops, and market stalls.

The best time to visit is after the sun goes down, when you can experience the electric energy of the night market. We were too tired to go back later that night, but it's on my bucket list for next time!

Wat Arun

The next stop will be the pier at Wat Arun. This temple was built over 700 years ago during the Ayutthaya period and is one of the most recognizable landmarks in Bangkok.

The architecture and intricate details are mindblowing! The interior is closed, but visitors can walk around the exterior. You can even rent traditional clothing and hire a photographer to take photos of you around the temple grounds.

The Grand Palace

Hop off at the Tha Chang Pier to reach the Grand Palace. The two main buildings within the extensive Grand Palace complex include the royal palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

A strict dress code is enforced at the Grand Palace, so be sure to cover your shoulders and legs. There is an admission fee, which includes an audio guide, and free tours are offered throughout the day.

The Temple of the Reclining Buddha is also located near the Grand Palace and is worth the extra walk.

Khao San Road

The last stop is at the Phra Arthit Pier, where you'll find Khao San Road. This street is home to one of the most popular night markets in Bangkok. It has a reputation for getting a little wild after sunset, but during the day, it has a family-friendly atmosphere.

The small street is filled with the sights, sounds, and smells of local vendors selling street food, fresh produce, handmade goods, and inexpensive souvenirs.

Lunch and Shopping Malls

After the boat cruise, we headed into the heart of the city for lunch and a little retail therapy.

Bangkok is known for its massive shopping malls, and our first stop was at CentralWorld. This is the 11th largest shopping mall in the world, and it is massive!

While we were here, we grabbed lunch at Baan Ying, and it was one of our favorite meals of the entire trip.

We ordered several different dishes to try, and we loved them all. The Pad See Ew and Mango Sticky Rice were my favorites!

The MBK Center is also one of the most popular malls in Bangkok. The 8-story mall is filled with mid-range shops selling everything you can imagine. Many of the products are cheap knock-offs, so you get what you pay for.

ICONSIAM is known as the "Mother of All Malls" and is also worth visiting. Here, you'll find more upscale stores and international restaurants.

Dinner at Nobu Bangkok

For dinner, we splurged at Nobu Bangkok, dining on the 58th-floor terrace with incredible views of the city skyline.

The food was excellent (though pricey and on the smaller side), so we ended the night with some late-night street food to fill up.

Bangkok also has plenty of rooftop bars. The most popular is Sky Bar at Lebu, which was featured in the movie *The Hangover II*.

We spent another night at Aloft before our early morning flight to Chiang Rai.

For more details and recommendations, see our guide [The Best Things to Do and Places to Eat in Bangkok](#).

Day 3: Chiang Rai

Fly to Chiang Rai

That morning, we flew north to Chiang Rai on a short, inexpensive domestic flight and checked into the [Marriott Le Meridien Chiang Rai Resort](#).

Thanks to our Marriott status, we got early check-in, but luggage storage is also an option if your room isn't ready.

Breakfast at Chivit Thamma Da Coffee House

After an early morning flight, you'll want to enjoy a nice, relaxing breakfast. Chivit Thamma Da Coffee House is a beautiful riverside cave that serves delicious homemade dishes using locally sourced ingredients.

Temple Hopping

After breakfast, spend a few hours exploring the region's most popular temples. Just make sure you dress appropriately and keep your shoulders and legs covered when visiting the

temples.

Wat Rong Khun

Wat Rong Khun, also known as the White Temple, is such an incredible work of art! The sculptures tell a story of death and redemption as you cross the bridge to reach the temple.

There are so many intricate details to absorb, so take your time soaking them all in!

Wat Rong Suea Ten

The next temple, Wat Rong Suea Ten, is also known as the Blue Temple. This vibrant blue temple with gold trim is absolutely beautiful!

Unlike many of the temples in Thailand, this temple is open to visitors. You can step inside and see the massive statue of Buddha and the beautifully painted interior.

Wat Huay Pla Kang

This temple is also referred to as the Big Buddha Temple. However, the massive statue at the top of the hill is actually of Guanyin, the Chinese Goddess of Mercy, and not Buddha.

For a small fee, you can take an elevator inside the statue to a lookout point behind Guanyin's eyes.

One of my favorite features of the impressive temple complex is the staircase flanked by giant Naga, or mythical dragon serpents.

Lunch at Por Jai Restaurant

Khao Soi is a popular Thai dish that originated in the northern region of Thailand. It is a coconut curry noodle dish, and the best place to try it is in Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai.

Por Jai Restaurant had the best reviews for this authentic dish, and it did not disappoint! The flavor is so rich and creamy, and we loved the combination of chewy and crunchy noodles.

Relax at the Resort

After a busy morning, we headed back to the resort to take a nap and relax by the pool for a few hours.

The property is tucked into the jungle next to the river and is so peaceful and serene. You can also book a massage at the spa, although you can find cheaper deals in town (try Namwan Thai Massage & Spa).

Walking Street Night Market

We visited on a Saturday night, which is when the weekly night market is held on Thanalai Road.

It was so fun experiencing a traditional Asian night market! The open-air market features hundreds of vendors selling traditional street food and local goods.

We had to try the obligatory fried crickets just to say we tried it, but the Pad Thai and banana roti were our favorites. We sampled so many different dishes and went back to our hotel stuffed and happy that night!

If you aren't visiting on a Saturday, the Chiang Rai Night Bazaar is held daily from 6 pm until 11 pm.

For more information and recommendations, see our guide [24 Hours in Chiang Rai](#).

Day 4: Chiang Mai

Bus From Chiang Rai to Chiang Mai

The next morning, we booked a bus ticket to Chiang Rai through [12Go](#). We left Bus Terminal 1 in Chiang Rai at 12 pm and arrived in Chiang Mai around 4 pm.

From there, we booked a private transfer through Chai Lai Orchid and drove an additional 1 hour and 15 minutes to arrive at the elephant sanctuary.

Check into Chai Lai Orchid

Staying at the Chai Lai Orchid elephant sanctuary was one of the highlights of our trip!

This ethical sanctuary is home to 22 rescued elephants and provides a safe and loving environment for them to thrive.

When we arrived, we checked into our bungalow. The thatched hut was a little more rustic than we thought, but it was all part of the experience.

We ate dinner at the open-air Mountain Cafe and enjoyed delicious Pad Thai with sweeping views over the jungle canopy.

We ended the night with a traditional Thai massage. We loved listening to the sounds of the jungle in the open-air massage room, but we quickly learned that traditional Thai massages are pretty intense! I would opt for an oil massage for a more relaxing experience.

Day 5: Chiang Mai

Elephant Room Service

The next morning, elephants came to our room to deliver room service breakfast, and it was the cutest thing ever!

We were able to feed them bananas, take photos, and play with them for about 10 minutes. It was such an unforgettable experience!

Jungle Adventure Tour

Chai Lai Orchid offers full and half-day jungle adventure tours. We booked the half-day tour since we were flying to Phuket later that evening.

The tour begins with elephant feeding time, where we learned a lot of interesting facts about elephants while hand feeding them.

We then took them on a walk through the jungle, which was such a cool experience. It's like taking a 3-ton dog for a walk! We meandered through the beautiful jungle trails with these gentle giants by our side. They would stop occasionally to scratch their backs on a tree trunk or cool off in the dirt. It was fun to get to know their individual personalities.

We ended down by the river where we were able to bathe the elephants. They loved getting splashed with cool water and getting scrubbed down with the coarse sand.

It really was such an unforgettable experience to spend the day caring for these beautiful creatures. They stole my heart!

For more details and information, see our guide [An Honest Review of Chai Lai Orchid](#).

After our adventure day, we enjoyed another meal at the outdoor cafe while the elephants roamed freely around the property.

Flight to Phuket

We then headed back to Chiang Mai, where we took another inexpensive flight down to Phuket and stayed at the [Sixteenth Naiyang Beach Hotel](#). The hotel was affordable, conveniently located near the airport, and the rooms were clean and spacious.

Day 6: Koh Yao Yai

Speedboat Transfer from Phuket to Koh Yao Yai

We woke up that morning and took a scheduled shuttle down to the Ao Po Grand Marina. From there, we hopped on a speedboat that took us to the Santhiya Koh Yao Yai Resort.

Check into the Santhiya Koh Yao Yai Resort

[Santhiya Koh Yao Yai Resort](#) is on the island of Koh Yao Yai, about 30 minutes from Phuket, but it feels a world away from the crowded streets and beaches of Phuket.

The sprawling luxury resort is absolutely beautiful and was my favorite place that we stayed on our trip.

I especially loved the outdoor bathtub in our room, the infinity pool overlooking the ocean, the beachfront restaurant, and the beautiful carved wooden details throughout the resort.

We were surprised at how reasonably priced the rooms were. The same resort would have easily been 3 times the cost in the States!

Ride Scooters Around the Island

After getting settled into our room and eating lunch at the beachfront Chantar Restaurant, we headed out to explore the island.

We took the shuttle into the cute little town of Ban Lo Pa Ret next to the resort and rented scooters from Next Step KohYao for only \$6 for the day.

We headed north on the single-lane road that led through local villages, passed by thick groves of rubber trees, and hugged along the coast with beautiful ocean views.

Our final destination was Laem Had Beach, where we walked on a sandbar that swirled out into the ocean.

The island doesn't get much traffic, so it was a relaxed and stress-free drive. Just remember, they drive on the left side of the road in Thailand!

Evening at the Resort

Spend the rest of the evening relaxing at the resort. Enjoy a sunset swim and dinner at Saaitara Restaurant overlooking the bay. They also offer a fire show on select nights of the week.

Day 7: Koh Yao Yai

Phi Phi Islands or Krabi Boat Tour

The next morning, we headed out on a boat tour to explore the other islands. We were hoping to take a boat tour to the famous Phi Phi Islands, but the weather wasn't cooperating. If you have favorable weather, you can book a tour through the hotel or a local operator in town.

Instead of the Phi Phi Islands, we took a day trip to Railay Beach in Krabi that was arranged through the hotel. The beach is stunning with white sand, hidden caves, and towering limestone formations.

We hiked up to the lookout point, watched wild monkeys playing in the trees, and spent the afternoon swimming in the warm turquoise water.

From Krabi, you can also take a longtail boat tour to explore other nearby islands.

Relax at the Resort

After going non-stop for the past few days, it was nice to have the entire afternoon and evening to just relax at the resort. We enjoyed the pools, the outdoor tub, and a nice long nap in the air-conditioned room.

We also made reservations for a beachfront massage, and it was one of the best massages I've ever had! It was only \$22 for a one-hour massage, which was such an amazing price, but we found other massage tents further down the beach that offered one-hour massages for only \$12.

It was the perfect way to spend our last night on the island!

For more information and recommendations, see our guide [How to Spend a Weekend on Koh Yao Yai Island](#).

Day 8: Phang Nga

Travel to Phang Nga

The hotel check-out is at 11:30 am, so enjoy a slow morning and the most delicious breakfast buffet that is included with your stay.

You'll arrange transportation back to Phuket through the hotel. This includes a speedboat transfer to the Ao Po Grand Marina in Phuket, as well as a shuttle van back to the airport. From the airport, use the Grab app to get a ride to the Sametnangshe Boutique Hotel, about an hour north of Phuket. You can arrange transportation through the hotel, but it was cheaper to use the Grab app.

Check into the Sametnangshe Boutique Hotel

It is worth staying at [Sametnangshe Boutique Hotel](#) for the views alone! The hotel is perched on a hill overlooking the majestic Phang Nga Bay. We couldn't get enough of that view!

The hotel itself was a little more worn and less luxurious than it looks online. We stayed in a basic room, and it was the most expensive place that we stayed on our entire trip. The upgraded rooms with outdoor tubs and private pools do look beautiful, although they are pricey.

The property didn't quite live up to my expectations, but the impeccable service (and views) made up for it. Everyone on the staff was beyond kind and made us feel like family!

Relax at the Hotel

We spent another relaxing afternoon and evening lounging by the pool, playing games in the rec room, and enjoying meals on the outdoor patio with views of the bay.

It was especially gorgeous at sunset, and I wouldn't mind going to bed and waking up to that view every day!

Day 9: Phang Nga

Enjoy the complimentary breakfast at the hotel before heading out on a longtail boat tour of Phang Nga Bay.

Phang Nga Bay Longtail Boat Tour

We booked a private longtail boat tour of the bay through the hotel, and it was such a fantastic way to spend the morning!

Our first stop on the tour was at a hidden bat cave, where we explored around.

Next, we stopped at James Bond Island which was made famous in the James Bond movie, *The Man With the Golden Gun*.

Lod Cave was our next stop. This included a kayak tour to the cave, but unfortunately, the tide was too high and we couldn't access the cave. It was still beautiful to kayak through the mangroves, though.

Our last stop was Koh Panyee, a floating village that has been around for over 200 years.

For more details, see our guide [Top Things to Do in Phang Nga](#).

Evening Flight to Bangkok

After our tour, we grabbed lunch at the hotel before heading back to the Phuket Airport. We took a late afternoon flight to Bangkok, where we stayed the night at the same Aloft Hotel before our flight home the next morning.

Final Thoughts

This 9-day Thailand itinerary was fast-paced, but we loved every second of it. From the bustling streets of Bangkok to the serene temples of Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai, from island adventures to peaceful sunsets in Phang Nga Bay. It truly gave us a taste of Thailand's incredible diversity.

We left with full hearts, a memory card bursting with photos, and zero regrets. A piece of our heart will always belong in Thailand, and we can't wait to go back!