

Undiscovered Thailand

On Behalf of Owner



The Northern Village Food Market

You would not normally associate a bustling food market with a covered air conditioned shopping centre, but there is one in Chiang Mai. Located in the Airport Plaza shopping center on the ground floor underneath the Northern Village (one of the best places to find quality souvenirs) is a collection of food stalls where you can enjoy an extremely good value meal (you shouldn't need to pay more than \$1 a head for any one dish) or buy locally produced delicacies, that make great gifts or perfect snacks for picnics and take home meals.

The food stalls cater for early every variety Thai food, including Khao Soy (a Northern curry dish with crispy noodles), every variety of noodle and rice dish you can think of and even Dim Sum. There are also several stalls selling fresh fruit juices, smoothies and desserts such as fried banana.

Designed to replicate an idealized version of a Thai market, I am sure it was originally created for tourists. However, nearly all the customers appear to be local people. Most of the menus are in Thai, but there are English translations available at some of the stalls. If in doubt, just point!

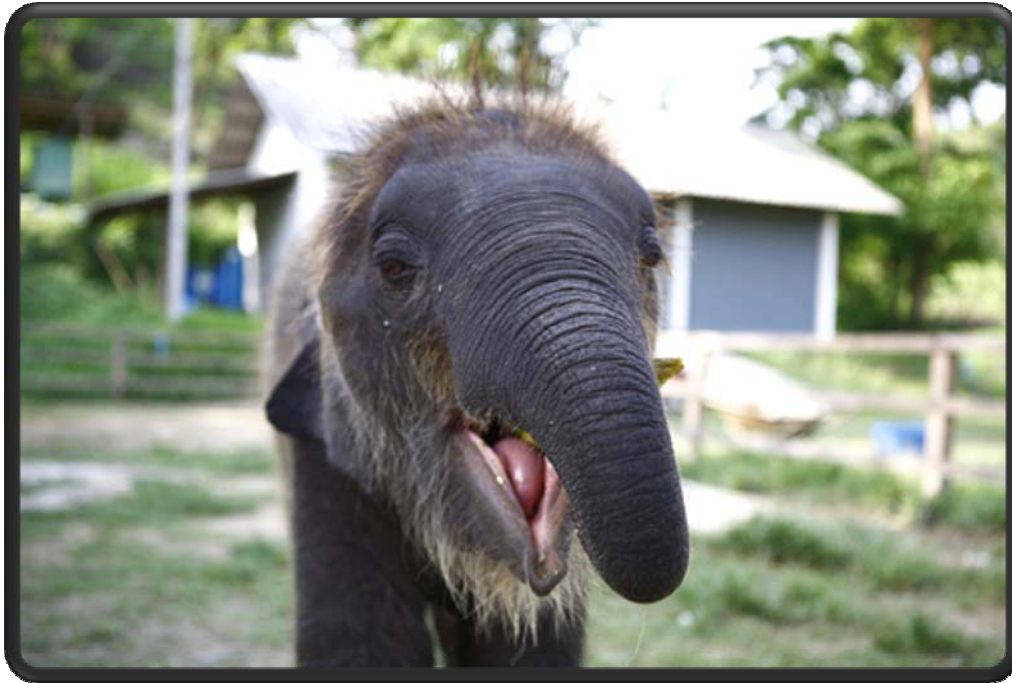


Kanom Krock

On returning from a journey to Nan, my wife asked me to divert to a small village off the main road. She remembered a small shop from 30 years ago when she was a small child that made kanom krock, and wondered if it was still there. It was.

Shaped into small rounded discs (UFO like), and made from the basic ingredients of coconut milk and flour, they do not look overly appetizing at first glance. However, they are delicious. Often laced with various vegetables (e.g. sweet corn and sliced onion leaf) and served piping hot they taste better than any other Thai sweet that I have encountered.

In Chiang Mai it is difficult to find places that sell them. However, there is a stall in the Northern Food Hall (see article) near to the outside entrance that specialises in them. For a mere 15bht for six, you'll experience a taste out of this world!



Thai Elephant Conservation Center

There are many places to see elephants in Chiang Mai. Perhaps the least touristy option is the [Thai Elephant Conservation Centre](#) near Lampang. Dedicated to the conservation of the elephant and under royal patronage, the centre comprises an elephant hospital, various conservation projects and even mahout training (there are sometimes one day training courses available). There is some touristy stuff too, like elephant riding and daily shows, but the whole place has a worthy feel to it and generally attracts fewer tourists than other elephant centres that tend to be nearer Chiang Mai.

We arrived late one afternoon, when all the activities had ceased for the day. However, we were able to drive around and feed two baby elephants. The kids were a tad scared but the adults loved it! The whole experience was very informal (we simply paid a worker a few baht for some bamboo to feed them) but very rewarding. If you are staying at Lanna Hill House a great day trip would be to drive over the summit of Doi Mon Larn, through Chae Son national park and then to Lampang, taking in the elephant centre on the way back. It is also worth having a drive around Lampang, as there are many old teak houses to admire and a beautiful old railway station.



A Train Journey to Yesteryear

In many countries the romance of train journeys has been lost. They're expensive and the experience can be somewhat sanitized. Not so in Thailand. The trains are rickety, a little slow and you can even open the windows. Everyone seems to be having fun and even if your kids are screaming no-one will hear them, as the din is just too loud! What is more, a ticket from Chiang Mai to Lampang is a mere 30 bht (50p, \$1).

This will not be everybody's cup of tea, especially when holiday time is so valuable. However, I would almost guarantee children will love it. It is more Thomas the Tank Engine than British Rail. There are 6 or 7 stops on route to Lampang (a 2 hour journey), all of which would not look out of place on the island of Sodor (Thomas the Tank Engines home). It passes through Doi Khun Tan national park where you can alight. The scenery here is spectacular, with a tunnel and two viaducts helping to traverse the hilly landscape. There are vendors on the train selling cold drinks, snacks, fresh fruit and various local delicacies.

If two hours is too long, and you don't want to arrange for a lift back from Lampang, then you can stop in Lamphun. This is a pretty little town with lots of ancient temples and hardly any tourists. There is even an excellent play ground for kids near to the moat built by a local politician.



Coffee Shop on top of Mountain

Christmas day 2006. We decided to load up the car with a few goodies for disadvantaged hill tribe kids and embark on a good deed run. We targeted the Hmong village at the summit of Doi Suthep. As we neared the top the covered road became dirt track and we wondered if we would ever find the village. Then we approached a magical scene: A coffee shop perched on the side of the mountain, overlooking a plantation and Chiang Mai. The skies were blue and it was a very cool 15c.

The coffee was fresh from the fields and the staff were Hmong, adorned in traditional dress and beaming with smiles. It was so cool, that we vied for space in the sunshine. If there was ever a perfect place to sip coffee and let the world go by, this was it.

To find the coffee shop, take the road to the top of Doi Suthep and head for the second Hmong village. Once you hit the dirt track, you can't miss it.



Flying through the Treetops

[Flight of the Gibbon](#) is one of Chiang Mai's newest and best eco-tour destinations. Once more it is a mere 30 minute drive from Lanna Hill House.

Located in pristine rain forest near to the magical village of Mae Kompong at around 1,300m above sea level, guests have the opportunity to fly between trees on a zip line. The total journey is about 2km and can take a couple of hours as you have to "unbuckle" between each tree top station, traverse bridges and ab sail between different levels.

It is well worth the 2,200 bht per head (which includes a meal and waterfall tour), but don't expect to see too much wildlife (there are certainly no gibbons to be seen). It is a lot of fun, there is a lot of focus on safety and some of the lines can be outright thrilling. The ancient forest around here is truly beautiful and ever green all year round. I doubt you will see better forest anywhere around Chiang Mai.



Vegetarian Restaurant

“Churn” means welcome in Thai. This is always a guarantee at this extremely imaginative and popular restaurant in Chiang Mai. Although vegetarian, meat eaters certainly should not be put off. There are a wide range of extremely tasty dishes incorporating traditional Thai herbs and spices, to suit all palettes.

The restaurant is located off Nimmenhamind road, down Soy 17. There is a large covered garden area, or if it's too hot (or cold) there is an air conditioned room. Lunch comprises a buffet of salads, various noodle dishes and a wide selection of curries, which are mainly translations of the meat version into delicious vegetarian ones. Meat substitutes include mushrooms, tofu and soy. The buffet includes healthy drinks such as lemon grass flavoured water. Expect to pay just over \$2 or £1 to eat as much as you like.

The dinner menu is a la carte, and includes many of the dishes that are served at lunch. The curries are particularly delicious and are all served with a choice of salad, fresh vegetables and brown rice. Pricing is similar to lunch.

The owners both speak good English and would be delighted to know if you are staying at our House.



Northern Thai Food

Hua Jai Yong is without doubt the best Northern Thai food restaurant in the world. Tucked away in a side street, about 15 minutes east of the city, it has gathered a huge following among local people and even members of the royal family. You are however unlikely to ever see a tourist there. The place is almost always full, allowing the owners the luxury of only opening for lunch (it closes at 5pm each day)

Constructed from the frame of an old teak house, the restaurant is more rustic than modern. Traditional Thai music contributes to the authentic feel of the place. But the food is the star. Unusually for Thailand, dishes are almost always served piping hot, fresh from the kitchen. Food is always prepared on the day and therefore always tastes fresh. If you come too late, some of the popular dishes will have run out. There's no running to the freezer or microwave at this restaurant.

Personal favourites include Gaeng Bplee (Bannana flower curry), Sie Oua (traditional spicy Thai sausage), Pak Chaeng Dao (an egg dish with fresh green vegetables and herbs) and Gaeng Hang Lae (a traditional pork curry. It has been remarked that they do the best version of this dish in Thailand). For the more adventurous you can try Jack fruit curry and various dishes made from frogs (not for me!). There are several fish dishes including a delicious fish pate (at least that is what it looks like) all served with the ubiquitous sticky rice. There are enough options on the menu to satisfy kids or those who do not like very spicy food.