



Thailand Chiang Mai

Safety and support for all program participants is paramount for Freepackers. This field manual serves as your go-to guide when preparing to depart on your adventure, including a packing list, further details on health and safety, arrival information, suggested preparatory reading (where relevant), and more.

Arrival

Please note that arrival logistics may be altered at short notice – check for updates regularly to ensure you are aware of any late changes.

Visa Requirements

It is your responsibility to ensure you have the correct visa for your trip.

You will need a Non-Immigrant-O Visa for this Program.

In order to volunteer in Thailand, you should first acquire a Non-Immigrant-O Visa. For most nationalities this must be arranged in advance. Please contact the NGO Office for supporting documentation.

Check with the immigration authorities of the countries you intend to visit, or see www.cibt.com for visa application advice and information.

Volunteers and interns staying for longer than 90 days may need to make a border run to extend their visa.

When you arrive in Thailand, it is advised to open your passport on the page that shows your Non-O visa. Please make sure the immigration officer activates the visa and gives you a 90-day stamp.

Keeping in Touch

You will have limited access to long-distance communications whilst on the program, so make sure friends and family know how often they can expect to hear from you. Wi Fi is available at Root's coffee shop in the village, but be aware that power cuts and storms make this unreliable. On visits to towns, internet cafes are available. Mobile phone reception is possible and relatively reliable on site, and sim cards with AIS 1-2-GO company can easily be purchased in the city. The AIS sim card is the most reliable in the village and the staff members can help you purchase one on Sunday before leaving for the village. If you are using a Thai Sim card you will need to have an unlocked smart phone and a phone that can use 3G.

If your bags go missing in transit, **don't panic!** This does occasionally happen, and you are usually reunited with your belongings within a few days. Consult airline representatives in the baggage claim area. You may be given a file/reference number; it is wise to also ask for a contact telephone number for follow-up.

Living Conditions

Facilities will be more basic than you are accustomed to – please travel with an open mind and a willingness to adapt to local conditions.

First night accommodation is in shared rooms with shared bathroom facilities.

In the village, each volunteer has their own room in a local homestay. This will either be in the homestay with the family (private room) or in a private hut away from the main house. There is cold running water for washing and drinking water is provided. Asian style squat toilet facilities are available. Participants will also be given at least one base duty day whilst on project to help keep base hygienic for everyone to use.

Food

All meals are provided in the village. Most meals are rice based with fresh vegetables and meat/fish/egg. The food is typically richly flavored with chili and local herbs. Vegetarians can easily be catered for and spice levels can be adjusted. With dietary requirements, keep in mind the food will be basic. Breakfast is served at base on a daily basis. Lunch is provided by the homestay as a pack-up each day. Dinner will be served for the homestay in the evening, but volunteers do not eat with the homestay family.

Electricity

Supply: 220V 50Hz
Source: Mains (but power cuts frequent)
Sockets: US 2-prong style (no earth) is most common

Laundry

Local laundry services are available and fairly inexpensive. Otherwise, participants can purchase detergent and wash by hand.

Getting Around and Exploring Further

It is a 2 hour drive to the town of Mae Chaem. Travelling around the local area is easily done on foot. There is no public transport but visits into the city by car can be arranged at your expense

In your down time you will be free to travel in the local area. The program is unscheduled during weekends. In this time you could visit Doi Inthanon National Park, go bamboo rafting, or make a trip into the Chiang Mai or Mae Hong Son for some western comforts. There is the opportunity to go into Chiang Mai every two weeks, with the staff and volunteers going in for the new volunteer intake.

Short or extended trips to neighboring Laos or Thailand's beautiful islands and beaches are also possible after completion of the program.

Finance

Local currency: **Thai Baht**

Participants typically spend approximately 2,000 THB per week for snacks, drinks, internet and phone cards, and hired transport for visits into the city. You may spend more than this if you are planning to stay in the city on some weekends. We recommend that you travel with cash as your main source of funds, although having a credit/debit card as a backup is wise. Additional transport into town and other expenses while in town can be more costly so please plan your budget accordingly if you plan to spend more time in town. Long-term interns and volunteers should consider visa renewal costs. ATMs are available in major towns. Only cash is accepted in the village and project site. We recommend securing enough Thai Baht while in Chiang Mai to last your stay on site (bills smaller than 1,000 THB are recommended).

There are small shops in the village that stock drinks, snacks, cigarettes, and very basic essentials. Mae Chaem, about 2 hours drive away, has more selection of basic supplies. In Chiang Mai City, about 5 hour's drive away, all kinds of shopping is available, with western style restaurants and hotels.

Background Check

A background/police check is required for this program

Health & Safety

A change of environment, climate, food and lifestyle often results in minor, and occasionally more serious, illness. Please inform staff if you feel unwell at any time.

The nearest emergency medical facilities are located in Khun Yuam Town, about 45 minutes away. We take great steps to ensure your safety, by providing expert elephant handlers during all contact time, teaching you to read elephant behaviour, and providing safety briefings on arrival.

First Aid trained staff will be on hand. Please note that the NGO cannot provide specific medical advice. Please consult your primary care provider (doctor, GP, etc.) or visit a travel clinic for further information.

Very important to note regarding the Travel Insurance required - please ensure your policy covers Helicopter evacuation.

Pre Departure Training

Staff in the field will provide training on the skills required, but you may benefit from learning more about local history, culture and customs before you travel. Taking the time to learn some basic Pakinyaw - the villagers' first language - will enhance your experience. You can find some basic phrases in the training manual. The villagers also speak Thai as a second language. You will find many resources online from the keywords "Asian Elephant" to learn about our target species.

Please read the papers listed here to learn about the issues this project is dealing with: www.elephants.com/ptsd.php
And visit this website to learn about issues captive elephants face: www.elemotion.org

Packing List

Essential Equipment

These are items which staff in the field have deemed as required, or which previous volunteers all agree are must-haves. This list is based on someone volunteering for 2 weeks:

- 1 Large Rucksack (Backpack): (65+ litres / 4,000+ cubic inches) Or you could use a suitcase instead.
- 1 Daypack (Backpack): (25+ litres / 1,500+ cubic inches) Is recommended for our long walks with the elephants and to carry your water, sunscreen, and snacks to project work sites. Waterproof liners for important and non-waterproof items. Canoe/dry sacks are excellent, but trash bags also suffice! Essential during the rainy season (Aug - Oct)
- 1 pair of walking boots / trainers / sneakers. You will be hiking on steep terrain nearly everyday. Bear in mind shoes will often get wet and take a long time to dry in a humid environment, therefore, do not bring brand new shoes or ones that will take a long time to dry. A comfortable pair of trainers / sneakers are best in the dry season and work very well with thin quick drying socks.
- 2 pairs of shorts. Quick drying board shorts are great. All shorts should cover past the knees to respect the modest culture.
- 1 pair of sandals (flip-flops / thongs) Best for the hot climate! Even in the village, they will need to function on steep uneven ground and slippery muddy surfaces – think practical, not high fashion! It is common in Thailand to take shoes off before entering a building so ensure these shoes are easily taken on and off.
- 3 pairs of working trousers. Light-weight, cargo pants / cotton / linen are idea to cover from the sun and still stay cool.
- 5 hiking shirts. Bring any quick drying old shirts. Collars are good for insects and to prevent sunburn on the back of your neck. Light, long-sleeved shirts are best for the sun and also necessary for chopping tall grasses.
- Extra shirts/pairs of trousers may be advisable in wet season as it can take time for clothes to dry. You will be hiking every day so bring enough for a change of clothes with this in mind.
- Casual clothing Lightweight tops and long pants are best for evenings and down time. Normal casual dress is suitable in town and the markets in Chiang Mai are full of options. At the project and in the village, modest dress is expected at all times- shoulders and knees must be covered.
- Waterproof jacket / Poncho Rainy season can start as early as July, and intense rain falls during Sept, ending in Oct.
- Swimming trunks / costume / bikini Please only bring MODEST swimming attire. Our co-workers come from a traditional rural culture. Bikini tops are only acceptable when covered with a T-shirt. Bottoms should cover to the knees. If swimming while away on weekends, any attire is acceptable.
- Towel an old and worn towel will dry more quickly, or you can buy a quick-drying travel towel. A sarong is definitely a useful extra.
- Hat/Cap The sun gets very hot during the day when working in the fields or on our long elephant walks, so a hat is advisable.
- Insect repellent We recommend using a natural based product such as citronella and eucalyptus, as DEET-containing repellent is harmful and believed to be carcinogenic. If using DEET, interns must wash their hands before any interaction with the elephants. Mosquito nets will be provided at your homestay.
- Water bottles / Camelbak / Platypus water bladder Drinking water is provided in large containers but you must bring your own reusable water bottle or personal container. Filtered water is available at base and from your homestays.
- Toiletries shampoo, soap, toothpaste, tampons, talc (or other absorbent powder), etc. We highly advise bringing biodegradable toiletries as the water here runs directly into the ground. These products can be found in most supermarkets; examples are Sanex 0 and Herbal Essence's Naked range. Several stores including Lush and Oxfam also have their own brand of bio toiletries. We are an environmentally conscious hub.
- Detergent/soap If you choose to wash your own clothes rather than sending them out. Detergent is also available at the village shop.
- Sun cream high factor, at least SPF15+.
- Torch/Flashlight a strong powerful flashlight/torch or a headlamp. Also useful for night hikes.
- Alarm clock for those early mornings!
- Electrical adaptor in the event that you're carrying electrical devices. Most electrical outlets in Thailand will fit a plug with either two horizontally opposed flat pins or two round pins in the same configuration.
- Any prescribed medication you need during your trip. Make sure it bears your name and description of reason and dosage.

Highly Recommended Equipment

- Camera Amazing photo opportunities are guaranteed!
- Sunglasses make sure they offer 100% UV protection. Cheap glasses can cause more damage than good.
- Leggings female volunteers often choose to wear leggings on hike and around base as legs must be covered.
- Wellies/Rubber Boots/Gum Boots during some hikes we walk through rivers and muddy ground. Some volunteers prefer the protection the wellies provide.

Optional Equipment

- Extra warm clothing may be required in colder seasons
- Laptop/Tablet/Smart Phone useful for doing work on, keeping in contact back home and also watching films etc.
- Headscarf / shamrag / bandana / baseball cap
- Travel games / Cards Books MP3 player / World Service Radio remember headphones.
- Umbrella A small, sturdy, strong umbrella can be very useful for sun and rain. Allows for better ventilation than waterproof rain gear.
- Snacks / sweets Anything you think you might crave but be aware that you will sweat and hence loose salts and use up sugar, so even people without a sweet tooth will crave sweets/snacks! Granola bars, chocolate, dried fruit or beef jerkey serve as good snacks in between the 3 daily meals. Village shops also sell snacks, iced coffee, etc. Many snacks can be purchased in Chiang Mai before arriving in the village.

Hints on Buying Kit

Light weight, long sleeves and long pants are best for the mountain climate. Be prepared for all your work clothes to get dirty! Past long term volunteers have recommended bringing extra work clothes and high quality hiking boots. Seek out ethical clothing brands and environmentally friendly/biodegradable products. Many of these can be found in your local areas using a quick Google search. Some brands to consider: Lush, Bodyshop, Oxfam own brand, Sanex 0, Dr. Bronners, Live Clean.

Additional Information

RECREATIONAL TRAVEL:

Volunteers and Interns staying for longer than 90 days may need to make a border run to extend their visa. Long-term interns may wish to make travel plans at this time and can agree a schedule with the field team. Volunteers may wish to extend their stay in-country to travel before or after joining the project.

Any additional or recreational travel will be at the volunteers own expense, so this should be budgeted for accordingly.

SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS:

Basic bedding and a thin mattress is provided at your homestay. You may wish to bring your own pillow but a basic one will be provided for you.

BASICS ABOUT THAI CULTURES AND SOCIAL CUSTOMS:

The customs of Thailand are very different from what we might be used to in the western world. This section is designed to give you a preview of social customs and culture in Thailand to help better prepare you to easily immerse into the culture of Siam.

- The "Wai" - The wai is the greeting used throughout Thailand. Hands are held pressed together in prayer position at your chest and your head bows slightly. If someone wais you, it is always polite to wai them back. You don't have to wai everyone you see on the street but it is a general greeting when meeting someone you know and respect or when being introduced to someone older than you for the first time. The wai is also often used when saying goodbyes or thanking someone. However, this isn't done in the village since the villagers are from the Karen tribe.
- Head and feet - The head is considered to be a sacred part of the body while the feet are low on the body and considered dirty. Therefore you shouldn't touch someone on the head except in the case of young children. You also shouldn't use your feet to point at things or put them up on tables. Always take your shoes off before entering someone's house or a temple. Some buildings and shops also require you to take your shoes off but you will notice other shoes outside if that is the case.
- The Royal Family - The royal family is highly revered throughout Thailand. Thais would never criticize the royal family or their actions. Be careful to be respectful of this and not voice any negativity towards the royal family as it will upset and offend and offenders can be prosecuted.
- Dress and Hygiene - Thais tend to be very clean and like to dress quite neatly when they go out of their house. It is not uncommon for Thais to shower 2 or 3 times a day. If you take on teaching in the community you will be treated with great respect and it is important for you appear neat and clean to fit your role. The weather is often hot and humid so you aren't expected to wear ties or heels. However, you will be visiting conservative rural villages where it is not appropriate to wear sleeveless shirts, shorts, short skirts above the knee, or anything see through. Sandals are fine anytime and are recommended for use in the village. If you are swimming in a tourist area, Thais are used to foreigners and it is perfectly acceptable to wear your swimwear. However, if you are swimming in a village or

with other Thais, it is common to wear shorts and a T-shirt. You will be hiking on steep terrain most days - good sneakers/hiking boots are essential!

- Food - Thai cuisine is internationally known for its aromatic flavors, use of fresh herbs and vegetables, and most of all, spicy chillies. Thai food is central to life in Thailand and eating is a part of just about every event. Please be open minded and willing to take part in experimenting with strange foods that may end up dazzling your palate. Food consists normally of rice and a vegetable, egg or meat dish. It will be different to traditional Thai food but you may still find similar ingredients and spices.
- Language - **In the village, the first language is Pakinyaw. You will have lessons in this language upon arrival by the local staff. It may be useful to look at the training manual for some basic words before you arrive. 'Da Blue' means 'hello' and 'thank you'! Most of the villagers also speak Thai, which is widely spoken throughout Thailand; so whilst in Chiang Mai or other areas of the country, you will find some basic Thai useful.** Even a simple hello (Sawadee ka (if you're a female)/ Sawadee kap (if you're male) or thank you (kap khun ka (female)/ kap khun kap (male) is always appreciated.

WEATHER:

We are based in a mountain community and thus temperatures drop considerably each evening. Be aware during the cold season, Oct to March, it can drop to as low as 10C at night. Afternoons will still get quite hot, reaching 25C, so be prepared to dress for both hot and cold weather. During hot season temperatures can reach well above 30C, it can also be very humid.

During the months of March to mid April, be aware that air quality levels may be lowered, as most of Northern Thailand takes part in burning the fields after harvest has finished.

FITNESS AND HIKING:

This project is located in the mountains of Northern Thailand. The mountainous terrain has protected this landscape from development and has shaped the culture of the hill tribe communities. The activities on this program are centered around daily hikes in the jungle with the elephants. Please be aware that these hikes are typically 3-7 hours long, often off track on steep, uneven and slippery slopes. Elevation changes of 200-300m are common. Hikes can also be made harder in the heat of the day in hot season. The village, which is located on a hillside, does not have a lot of flat ground either. Don't be put off by this, but be realistic. Preparing yourself by taking regular walks on a local forest trail would not be a silly idea.