



**Thailand & Cambodia
with Sherri Baptiste
Sept 29 – Oct 6, 2017**

Sept 29 – Arrive Chiang Mai

Today we will arrive in Chiang Mai, the cultural epicenter of Northern Thailand, nestled into the mountains astride the Ping River. Listed as one of Trip Advisor's "25 Best Destinations in the World," Chiang Mai's Old City still has traces of the walls and moats from its heyday as a religious and cultural center of the Lanna Kingdom in the 1500s. It also boasts hundreds of elaborate Buddhist temples, plus plenty of galleries, boutiques, cafes, and restaurants. In Chiang Mai, we'll stay at a lovely property, Tamarind Village Hotel, a secret sanctuary in the heart of historic Chiang Mai. The resort is named after a 200-year-old tamarind tree that sits in the heart of the property. The décor is traditional and the experience divine. On this first night in Chiang Mai, we'll receive a special welcome from our hosts before our evening yoga session.

Sept 30 — Historical Tour

A wonderful Chiang Mai tradition you don't want to miss is to witness the rural Lanna people delivering an early dawn breakfast to the local monks, who wander through the village with their alms bowls. We'll partake by traversing the winding local alleys to the market, where we'll purchase food, sweets, and flowers to give as offerings to the monks, who come from every local temple. The monks receive these offerings, and the people believe they gain merit by giving. We'll receive our blessing from a Buddhist monk, then continue our reverent tour past some of Chiang Mai's most noted temples and historic monuments. We'll return to the hotel by lunchtime, then for those interested, we'll learn how to make traditional herbal compresses from a variety of healing Thai herbs in accordance with ancient recipes. We'll conclude our day with an evening yoga session and optional dinner at the Ruen Tamarind Restaurant (approx. \$40).

Oct 1 — Elephant Sanctuary + Private Shopping Tour

After morning yoga, we will visit a local elephant sanctuary. After which will be an optional half-day private shopping tour of local artisans. Baan Tawai is a nearby village known for its wood-carved handicrafts and offers the best quality and prices in Thailand for such goods. After our evening yoga session, we'll meet for dinner at a special local restaurant

Oct 2 — Suthep Mountain and Royal Temple

We'll practice yoga together in the morning, and then enjoy a private village walk, where we'll participate in offerings at the local temple. We'll break off for lunch at leisure, then reconvene for an afternoon visit to Suthep Mountain and the Royal Temple, the most famous and sacred landmark in the region. Wat Prathat Doi Suthep is at the top of Suthep Mountain, 1,073 meters above sea level. This magnificent bird's eye view of Chiang Mai is one the locals are very proud of. We'll return to the Tamarind Village for evening yoga, followed by an optional excursion to the night market and dinner

Oct 3— Fly Chiang Mai to Siem Reap

After stretching our bodies in a morning yoga session before our journey, we'll collect our luggage, check out, and head to the airport for our flight to Cambodia. We will be met upon our arrival in Siem Reap and brought to our hotel where we'll spend the rest of the day at leisure as we enjoy the luxurious surroundings, and resting up for tomorrow's magical pre-dawn yoga experience.

Oct 4 — Sunrise Yoga and Purification Ceremony

Just before dawn, we'll gather on the hill at Phnom Krom Pagoda, with its expansive views overlooking the Angkor plains and the Tonle Sap Lake, for a special yoga and meditation practice. We'll arrive by car at the base of the hill, hike 20 or 30 minutes to the top guided by flashlights and the light of the moon, and meet with the Abbot and an elder monk from the pagoda to lead us in a purification ceremony with chanting and prayers, before a final blessing with holy water by the Abbot himself. After the blessing we may be able to do some meditation in front of the pagoda, as the rising sun will reveal the stunning landscape below—views of the Angkor plain, the great lake, and the temples of Angkor in the far-off distance. Around 9am, after this transformative experience, we'll descend for breakfast at the hotel, and spend the rest of the morning and early afternoon at leisure. A yoga class will be offered during this time and there will also be the opportunity to rest, or to partake in a treatment at the hotel's world-class Kong Kea Spa, where ancient Cambodian healing arts are practiced.

In the afternoon around 2:30pm we'll travel to the Victory Gate of Angkor Thom with a short optional walk along the 8-meter high laterite city wall to the Death Gate. We'll continue on to the Terrace of the Leper King, passing several stunning historic sites along the way. The pinnacle of our day will be reaching Jayavarman's state temple of Bayon at the center of the city, with its captivating giant stone faces and detailed bas reliefs depicting everyday life in the Angkorian era. We'll then convene for sunset drinks on a leisurely boat ride on the moat of Angkor Thom, witness to hidden elements of the ancient Khmer water systems alongside the lullaby of bird songs. We will return to The hotel just after sunset for free time and dinner on your own arrangement.

Oct 5 — Temples of the Forest

Starting early to beat the crowds at 7am, we'll travel by car to the reservoir of Srah Srang and explore the temple of Ta Prohm, walking from the West entrance to the East entrance (1-2km) where will meet our driver. We'll continue on and for a 15 min walk through the forest to the rarely visited temple of Ta Nei. There is a good chance we

have this beautiful Angkor temple all to ourselves. We'll have a peaceful breakfast in the area before we continue our exploration of the ancient temples nearby, concluding our morning at Ta Keo temple, "the mountain with bronze peaks," with its impressive five-tiered pyramid structure.

Around 11:30am we'll then travel to Siem Reap for an independent lunch at any of the town's many incredible eateries, before returning to the hotel for an afternoon of leisure. You'll have the option of visiting local artisans and galleries on this day, starting at Theam's house, a quirky mix of art studio, atelier, and artisanal gallery with works by on-premise artists, hard at work to revive the Cambodian craft sector. The next stop on this tour will be the flagship showroom and workshop of Madagascan-born and French-trained haute texture designer Eric Raisina and his exquisite handmade clothing collection. The tour will continue to Weaves of Cambodia (luxurious 100% fine-woven silk scarves), Artisans d'Angkor Centre (offering sandstone, silver, wood, and silk crafts), and John McDermott's Gallery (surreal and stunning black-and-white photography of the region). In the evening, we'll gather together at a small hidden stone temple in the forest known as Prasat Prei to practice yoga immersed in rich history.

We'll depart the hotel at 4:00pm to visit a small, hidden temple in the forest, Prasat Prei, an oft overlooked gem of Angkor, where we will enjoy the opportunity to experience what few in history have: yoga at an Angkorian temple! We will return to La Residence just after sunset for free time and dinner on your own arrangement.

Oct 6 — Angkor Wat

Explore one of the true wonders of the world, Angkor Wat Temple. Constructed over a period of 30 years during the reign of King Suryayarman, some say it is the largest religious complex in the world. Originally a Hindu mountain temple aligned to the Spring Equinox and the God Vishnu, it was converted to a Theravada Buddhist monument circa the 12th century and continues in that capacity today. We'll explore the well-preserved central complex and detailed bas reliefs depicting scenes from Hindu mythology and battles of the ancient empire. We'll aim to visit during the mid-morning lull to best avoid the crowds and then return to the hotel around 12:30pm to relax and enjoy free time, spa treatments, or shopping during the afternoon. A yoga class will be offered during this time.

In the late afternoon around 4pm we'll journey beyond the temples to a lovely rural landscape little changed since the days of Jayavarman VII. Here, we'll glimpse the contemporary Khmer culture often overlooked by tourists eager to see only temples—a timely opportunity to witness the intersection of ancient and contemporary culture before it is enveloped by infrastructure and technology. We'll visit a colorful contemporary pagoda to learn about the importance of Buddhism to rural communities and seek a blessing from the local monks. In the evening, we'll take a short journey by boat (depending on the water level) to the country villa Chandara, situated in a beautiful and tranquil village to the north of the Western Baray—an impressive man-made reservoir once integral to the Angkorian rice irrigation system. The tempo of the Cambodian

countryside is truly meditation in motion, and we'll likely see ox carts returning from the fields, as well as children washing their water buffalos and playing and laughing as they bridge jump into the stream. While our chef prepares your dinner you can wander across the levees of the rice paddies, look for fish traps, or walk to a viewpoint over the ancient reservoir. Listen to the elegance of traditional Khmer music played by local musicians, before being seated for your evening meal.

(*We recommend wearing comfortable, practical footwear suitable for walking and attire appropriate for entering a pagoda – shoulders and knees covered.)

Oct 7 — Journey Home

We'll depart from the hotel for our journey home, the sights and experiences of Cambodia rich in our hearts.

****PLEASE NOTE: Exact details and timing of the itinerary are subject to change****

Our Guides in Cambodia

The ABOUTAsia team was founded by Oxford scientists and scholars who work with Angkor's most capable and knowledgeable guides to create an outstanding experience. Living and working in Siem Reap just three miles from Angkor Wat, they will introduce us to the most talented artisans, lead us around authentic markets, and bring us to lesser known temples where we may very well be the only ones. We will be taken around by our private driver in an air-conditioned vehicle, a chilled bottle of mineral water always at hand. Additionally, all of their profits are given to local schools.

Crowd-Avoidance Itinerary

The incredibly popularity of Angkor Wat means that visiting there can mean trying to find your way around with hundreds of other tourists. We will also be traveling during one of the busier seasons. We're are therefore especially pleased to be partnering with ABOUTAsia as their extensive experience guiding groups in and around Angkor Wat will ensure we have the most unique experience possible exploring this incredible UNESCO World Heritage Site of Angkor Wat. Listen to the sounds of nature at work as you stand-alone in the morning mist among the soaring trees and serpentine roots of Ta Prohm. Come late afternoon, only the dip of your boatman's oar and the call of red-headed whistling ducks will disturb the tranquility of your sunset drink on an ancient Angkorian waterway. We will be taking you to Angkor's most incredible places *without the crowds*.

Giving Back

As a part of your participation a donation will be given on your behalf to ABOUTAsia's foundation which focuses on, [ABOUTAsia Schools](#), with a goal to sustainably leverage tourism revenue and keep it in-country.

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