

Essence of Thailand & Laos: A Cultural and Spiritual Journey

February 23 – March 5, 2020
with optional beach extension to March 7



Leadership: This tour will be led by longtime Buddhist practitioner and founder of Mindful Adventures, Elizabeth Prather. Elizabeth has been practicing Buddhism for over 20 years and engaged in many meditation retreats of various lengths. She has taught mindfulness and meditation at multiple community centers and founded [The Prather Group](#) a consulting firm that offers mindfulness programs for organizations and individuals as well as upscale, spiritually focused vacations to sacred places.

Elizabeth is a seasoned tour director, having led tours for Tauck, a luxury tour company, for fifteen years. She is excited to share two of her favorite countries with you and to bring together her spiritual practice and tour directing expertise to lead you on an unforgettable journey.



Overview: Join us on this journey to explore Thailand and Laos, jewels of Southeast Asia! You'll be immersed in the unique cultures, landscapes, and rich spiritual heritage of these countries. With inspiring temples housing skillfully crafted Buddha statues, royal palaces and lush and beautiful terrain, you won't want to miss this opportunity to explore the history, architecture, and sacred Buddhist sites of the region with us.

We'll start our journey in Chiang Mai, considered 'The Rose of the North' for its artistic and spiritual heritages, followed by a visit to the more remote northern region of Chiang Rai, with its tribal communities and relaxed atmosphere. After crossing the border to Laos, we travel via boat on the Mekong River to one of the most beautiful cities of Southeast Asia, Luang Prabang. We then fly to our final destination, Bangkok, Thailand's capital on the Chao Phraya River with its intriguing mix of Buddhist sites and old and modern side-by-side.



Day 1

Feb. 23 | Chiang Mai Arrival | no meals

Transfer from Chiang Mai Airport to your hotel accompanied by a local English speaking guide in the comfort of a private air conditioned vehicle with a professional driver. Your group leader will be at the hotel and available as needed (the front desk will have her room number). The hotel staff is amiable, and with the hotel's excellent location in the center of the old city, it is easy to walk around and explore on your own.

You will be picked up at 4:00 p.m. for an optional spa treatment. Discover for yourself the soothing results of a Traditional Thai Massage. Then a Thai herbal hot compress follows. Finally, an Aromatherapy Hot Oil Massage brings you full relaxation and recovery. Oasis Spa is open from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. If the 4:00 p.m. timing doesn't work with your arrival schedule, we can book you at another time.

Dinner is on your own. There are many good restaurants within a short walk from the hotel, or you can dine "in" at the hotel. Overnight in Chiang Mai at Tamarind Village 4-Star hotel (Superior) in a Lanna Room.



Day 2

Feb. 24 | Chiang Mai | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

After breakfast meet your group leader at 8 a.m. in the lobby for a brief orientation. Wear comfortable walking shoes and head out to explore the highlights of this charming South East Asian city by foot. From the banks of the Mae Ping River, we join the bustle of Waroros market, a favorite for Chiang Mai locals. We continue by rickshaw to Tapae Gate, Chiang Mai's main entrance to the old walled city. From here, we continue our walk to the city's most beautiful temples Wat Chedi Luang, where the famous Emerald

The tour is designed to be a blend of sightseeing and relaxation – in keeping with Thai and Laotian cultures. There will be opportunities for daily meditation (schedule permitting and optional) and instruction on meditation, in case you are new to it. We may also meditate, make offerings, and receive blessings at venerated monuments along the way. Your accommodations include luxurious boutique hotels in traditional architectural styles, lovely smaller resorts, and a 5-star centrally located hotel in Thailand's capital, Bangkok.

But that's not all! We are offering a three-day beach extension on the beautiful island of Koh Samui, Thailand. This will be unguided by the tour director, but she will be available via phone if needed. Your luxurious beachfront hotel offers the perfect location to relax and recharge while enjoying beautiful white sand beaches, coconut palm trees, great food, and ocean breezes.





Buddha was once enshrined, and Wat Phra Singh, home to an ancient sacred Buddha image.

Important Note: Upon entering any temples in Thailand and Laos, visitors must dress appropriately with their shoulders and knees covered. Comfortable walking shoes that you can easily take on and off are recommended.

Following the sightseeing, lunch is at a local restaurant. You can try the local dish Khao Soi, a noodle dish of the North. Then there is free time until a group welcome dinner is enjoyed at your hotel in the evening.

Overnight in Chiang Mai.

Day 3

Feb. 25 | Chiang Mai | Breakfast, Lunch

You will be picked up at 9:00 a.m. Uncover the secrets behind Thailand's famous dishes at the Pantawan Cooking School. Travel south of the city center to browse the stalls at a local fresh market. See herbs and spices and learn about their uses. During the visit, the chef will introduce local vendors and explain about Thailand's food culture. Continue to a traditional teakwood house where you will chop vegetables, stir up spicy sauces, and fry up sizzling dishes. Throughout the course, the chef will share his personal

story and offer tips for preparing these same dishes back at home. When everything is ready, sit down and enjoy what you made. Return to the hotel with a better understanding of Chiang Mai's foodie culture.

After a short break, you will be picked up from the hotel at 3 p.m. To take a journey of spiritual discovery. Start with a visit to the city's old town, venturing through the crumbling city walls and admiring a blend of old and new buildings. Catch glimpses of glittering pagoda spires illuminated by the late afternoon sun.

Continue on the spiritual trail taking a winding drive up into the hills. Climb up the staircase of Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, admiring the intricate *naga* (semi-divine serpent-like creatures with supernatural powers) carvings along the way. Upon reaching the top, explore the 14th-century pagoda and hear about its origins. Wander around the towering gilded stupa and take a moment to enjoy the views of Chiang Mai in the distance. Following your blessing ceremony at dusk when the temple is at its most peaceful, you can listen to the evening chanting of the monks while enjoying views of Chiang Mai and its glittering lights.

Overnight in Chiang Mai.



Day 4

Feb. 26 | Chiang Mai – Golden Triangle via White Temple Breakfast, Dinner

Set off after breakfast at 8:30 a.m. from Chiang Mai, traveling by private vehicle to Thailand's northern corner. The road passes through some suburban sprawl before entering the countryside. From time to time, enjoy fabulous views of surrounding mountains and lush rice paddies.

A stop will be made to stretch our legs at Wat Rong Khun. Translated as 'The White Temple,' this newer (1997) monument was designed by a famous local artist and features unusual Buddhist paintings and sculptures. After exploring, continue the drive north.



Upon arrival at Lanjia Lodge an hour and a half from Chiang Rai proper, a local juice with herbs will be served while you are checking in. Then free time to relax and enjoy the beautiful surroundings. *Lanjia* means peaceful in the Hmong language. There is a large deck available for your group that is appropriate for yoga, meditation, or other activities. Views from the lodge include many beautiful tree covered hillsides, the Mekong River in the distance and Laos beyond. Eat dinner and then watch traditional Hmong performances on the deck.

Overnight in Kiewkan village, Chiang Rai at Lanjia Lodge.

Day 5

Feb. 27 | Golden Triangle | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

After breakfast, enjoy a short presentation about the Hmong and Lahu tribes, the Golden Triangle area and the giant catfish (locally known as Pla Buek), the world's largest freshwater fish that is found in the Mekong River. Learn about activities that affect the Mekong River and people whose lives depend on it. Tour Hmong and Lahu hill tribe villages, including a visit at each of the shaman's houses. Drink tea with the shaman and discover why the fireplace is essential to the Hmongs. Lunch will be provided back on the lodge's terrace.

In the afternoon enjoy some more exploring and an optional first-hand experience making a Hmong style batik handkerchief with some local Hmong ladies (takes about 45 minutes). This is a rare chance to hang out with some local woman, and you may even end up even wanting to buy some of their beautiful work. Return to the lodge for dinner.

Overnight in Kiewkan village.

Day 6

Feb. 28

Kiewkan Village – Chiang Khong – Houay Xay – Pakbeng Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

You will have an early breakfast at Lanjia Lodge and then transfer at 7 a.m. to Chiang Khong accompanied by your guide.

Important note: Please prepare a small overnight bag for the Luang Say Lodge and leave your larger locked bag safely on the boat. There is a steep hill to climb to the hotel where you stay at in Pakbeng.

Around 8:00 a.m., you will arrive at the Thai Immigration Office. After crossing the Lao border at Houay Xay, you will need to stop and get your Laos visa on arrival (bring USD\$40 cash and a passport sized photo with you for this). A representative from the Luang Say Cruise company will be waiting to help you and provide transport to the shared cruise boat. Then it is "all aboard" for a two-day cruise down the Mekong River to reach Luang Prabang. Luang Say Cruise is "join in," meaning other people, not in our group, may be on the boat and at the hotel. The cruise company provides an excellent English speaking guide for this portion of the trip.

Your first stop is to visit a local hill tribal settlement. Soak in the authentic, rural way of life here before dipping into a delicious buffet lunch (onboard). Reach the small town of Pakbeng in the late afternoon. Depending on the river's current, the boat may reach Pakbeng in time to catch a sunset over the river.

Overnight at the Luang Say Lodge which has good food, excellent views, and pretty gardens.





Day 8

March 1 | Luang Prabang | Breakfast, Lunch

After breakfast begin your city tour at the former Royal Palace now the National Museum, the palace was built in 1904 during the French colonial era for King Sisavang Vong. Now it is home to exhibits of art, jewels, and items of historical interest. Then climb the 328 steps to the top of Mount Phousi to enjoy a panoramic view of the city and the surrounding countryside.



Day 7

Feb. 29 | Pakbeng - Pak Ou Caves - Luang Prabang Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

The boat departs promptly at 8:30 a.m. for the second half of the journey. You must be on board by this time! On the way to Luang Prabang, two stops will be made. Lunch is served on board. The first stop is at the village of Ban Baw, where you will see the processing of traditional rice alcohol. Continue downstream to the Pak Ou Caves. Locally referred to as Tam Ting, these two caves are carved out of towering limestone cliffs and contain thousands of gold lacquered Buddha statues of all different sizes.

Luang Prabang is another two hours downstream from Pak Ou. Arrive in Luang Prabang in the late afternoon/early evening, before sunset. Transfer to Santi Resort and Spa, just outside of town with lovely views of rice terraces. The hotel has excellent dining, and your dinner will be provided at the hotel restaurant, but this is not a group dinner so you can eat whenever you like between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m.

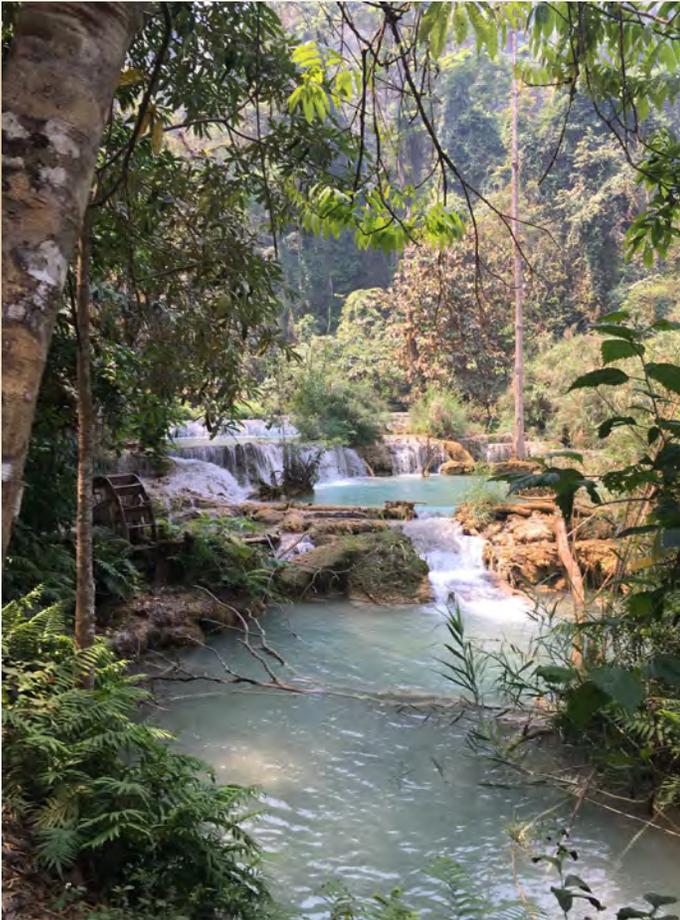
Overnight in Luang Prabang at Santi Resort & Spa 4-Star hotel (Superior) in a Deluxe room.



Visit Wat Mai with its unique five-tiered roof and golden bas reliefs. During Pimai, the Lao New Year, the small Buddha statue (Pra Bang, housed in the palace) is put on display in this temple. Visit Wat Sene and its beautiful golden facade. Lunch at 3 Nagas Restaurant in town.

Free time after lunch for you to explore on your own (visit the night market which is open from 5 p.m to 10 p.m. and located in the center of town, for example) or relax. The hotel provides shuttle service to the center of town, and there are many good restaurants.

Overnight in Luang Prabang.



On the way back visit Kuang Si Butterfly Park, home to hundreds of Laos' butterflies. Free time in the afternoon to explore on your own or relax at the hotel.

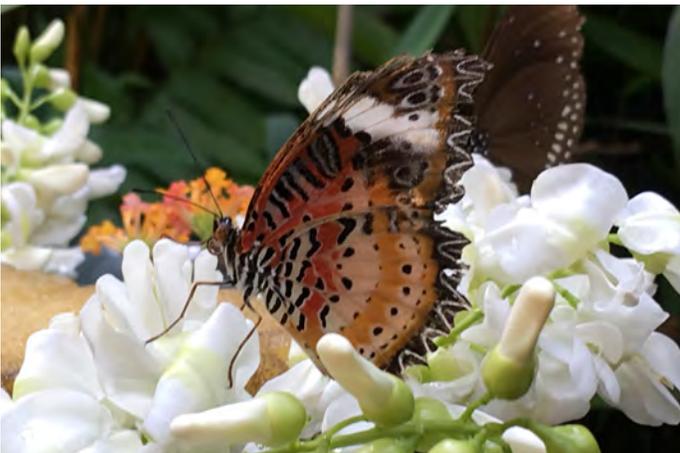
Overnight in Luang Prabang.



Day 9

March 2 | Luang Prabang | Breakfast, Lunch

After breakfast, we visit Wat Visoun, the holiest temple of the city. Continue with a drive through the Luang Prabang countryside to Kuang Si Waterfalls, soaking in the rice fields, hills and small villages along the way. Upon reaching Kuang Si Waterfall, stop at the Bear Sanctuary run by Free the Bears Fund Inc. Enjoy a nice walk, then relax and enjoy the beautiful surroundings. A picnic lunch, including local coffee, will be provided at Kuang Si Waterfall.



Day 10

March 3 | Luang Prabang – Bangkok | Breakfast

For early risers, there is a dawn visit to watch local monks collecting alms. As the sun begins to rise, long lines of orange-robed monks leave their temples and walk barefoot down the streets collecting offerings from Luang Prabang residents. It is a beautiful, serene ceremony that highlights the spiritualism of the Laos people. Return to the hotel for breakfast.

After breakfast, enjoy some free time at leisure until transport (provided by guide and driver) to the airport for your flight to Bangkok.

After retrieving your luggage please exit and continue to the arrivals hall and look to the LEFT to find your guide who will be holding a signboard with your group's name. You will then be transferred to your hotel in a private vehicle (20 miles/approx. 45 min). Your hotel is centrally located, and there are many good restaurants in the area.

Overnight in Bangkok at Movenpick Hotel, Sukhumvit 15, 5-Star (Deluxe) in Superior Room.



Day 11

March 4 | Bangkok | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

You will be picked up at 8:00 a.m. for a tour of Bangkok's essential sights. First, we visit the Grand Palace, the seat of Thailand's revered Royal family for more than 200 years. Take some time to explore this impressive complex of temples, palaces, pavilions, and museums. One must-see attraction is the enchanting Emerald Buddha, which, according to legend, is almost 2000 years old.

Next, continue to nearby Wat Pho—Bangkok's oldest temple, and arguably it's most impressive. Home to the magnificent 45-meter-long reclining Buddha, Wat Pho is also a place of learning, having served as Thailand's first school of traditional medicine and Thai massage. Admire the famed reclining Buddha image at Wat Pho before continuing to lunch at Eat Sight Story. From here you have a great view of the Temple of Dawn on the opposite side of the river.

After lunch, you will take a long-tail boat through Bangkok's canals to discover the real heart of the city. Start with a ride along the Chao Phraya River, also known as the 'River of Kings.' The passing skyline includes glittering pagodas in the shadow of towering skyscrapers. The boat turns off the main waterway and

onto the canals, or *klongs*. See why Bangkok is called the 'Venice of the East' as you cruise along the intricate network of canals. Capture glimpses of the houses on the water's edge and enjoy the slower pace of life away from the city center. Make a stop at the Royal Barge Museum (optional half-hour visit). See the eight spectacular boats used by Thailand's Royal Family to mark special occasions. Carved from teak and intricately decorated with gold leaf and mosaics, the barges are an impressive sight.

Then return to the boat and cruise back onto the Chao Phraya for one final stop. Go ashore to see Wat Arun, a 79-meter-high pagoda built in a style similar to Angkor Wat. Meaning 'Temple of Dawn,' Wat Arun is one Thailand's most beautiful temples and the perfect last stop.

A Farewell Dinner will be served at your hotel this evening.

Overnight in Bangkok.



Day 14

March 7 | Koh Samui – Bangkok | Breakfast

Morning and afternoon at leisure

A late check-out will be secured for you until 6:00 p.m. You will be transferred from the resort to Samui Airport accompanied by your guide in the comfort of a private, air-conditioned vehicle.

Suggested flight: PG 172 USM-BKK / 7:40 P.M.-8:55 p.m. (This evening flight is suggested as it can coordinate with the many international flights leaving Bangkok in the late night/early a.m.)

End of Himalayan High Treks Services

Please Note:

This itinerary is a tentative schedule for your trip. Changes may be made as we go along and will be announced as well as posted when possible in the hotel reception areas. Himalayan High Treks (HHT) will adhere to the itinerary if conditions permit. Many factors may dictate itinerary changes (either before departure or after your trip commences) such as weather, river and road conditions, political conditions, schedule changes of various outside entities such as airlines and monasteries, local government rules, regulations, and so on. HHT reserves the right to change this or any of its scheduled itineraries in the best interest of the trip participants. Our primary concerns are the safety, comfort, and well-being of our guests. Hotel accommodations listed in the itinerary are subject to change based on availability. If a change is necessary, we make every effort to book lodging of comparable quality. Payment for any added services during the trip may be required at the time the service is received. Please refer to the Our Policies section of our website (<http://www.hightreks.com/policy.html>) or the booking information section of our application form for more information.

February/March Weather:

Northern Thailand is expected to be warm varying from an average of 85 degrees during the day to a low of 65 degrees at night. The temperatures in Laos will be cooler ranging from about 80 degrees during the day to as low as 60 degrees at night and on the river. Note due to the dampness and breezes the river may feel even chillier. The boat provides blankets, but it is best to bring a light windbreaker style jacket or a sweater as well. Koh Samui will be perfect with day time temperatures of about 85 dropping to 75 in the evening. Rain is rare but not unheard of in the region at this time of year.

Day 12

March 5 | Bangkok Departure | Breakfast

Transfer to Suvarnabhumi Airport accompanied by an English speaking guide in the comfort of a private, air-conditioned vehicle.

– OPTIONAL BEACH EXTENSION –

Suggested flight: PG 963 BKK-USM / 11:30 a.m.-12:40 p.m.

Upon arrival at Samui Airport, your English speaking guide will be waiting for you at the meeting area holding a signboard with your name on it and transfer you in the comfort of a private, air-conditioned vehicle to your hotel in Koh Samui.

The remainder of the day is free to explore and relax on your own. Your group leader will not be with you, but she is available by phone in case you have any issues. The hotel staff are very helpful and will be able to arrange most things for you.

Overnight in Koh Samui at Bo Phut Resort & Spa 4-Star (Superior) in Deluxe Garden View Room.



Day 13

March 6 | Koh Samui | Breakfast

Free day to explore and relax on your own.

Overnight in Koh Samui at Bo Phut Resort & Spa, 4-Star (Superior) in Deluxe Garden View Room.

Trip Activity–Level:

Accommodations are upscale and comfortable. Activities are mild and may include easy day hikes of less than two hours in length.

Cost & Registration Details:

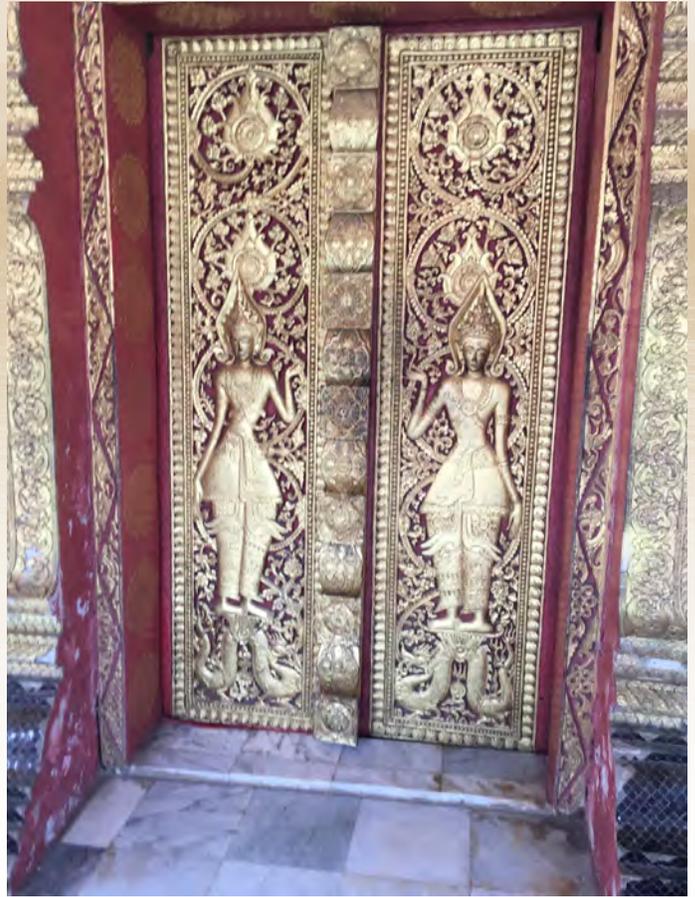
\$500 deposit required to hold your space. Deposit is due by September 3, 2019 or at time of booking and no later than November 23, 2019.

Main Tour land cost is \$4,050 (small group surcharge with less than 16 participants is \$300 to \$450). Minimum group size is eight. Unless we get a minimum number by September 3, we'll have to cancel. With that in mind, we are offering a \$200 discount to those who sign-up and pay in full via check by Tuesday, September 3 (or a \$100 discount for those who sign-up with a \$500 deposit (check or credit card) by September 3 and pay for the trip by the regular deadline of November 23, 2019). The deadline for sign-up is November 23, 2019. It is unlikely that we would be able to accept late sign-ups but if there is space available late sign-ups will be accepted with a service charge of \$100.

Koh Samui beach extension: \$670 (Tour leader available by phone only.)

If you would prefer to have a private room, you'll be charged a single supplement of \$925 for the main tour and \$560 for the Koh Samui beach extension.

This tour is being organized by Himalayan High Treks on behalf of Elizabeth Prather's Mindful Adventures. Please use the following link to register: <http://www.hightreks.com/apply.html>



Other Cost and Need Considerations:

Passport, Visa(s), Physician's Visit (highly recommended), Immunizations and Medications as needed, Emergency Medical and Evacuation Insurance, travel to Chiang Mai, Thailand or international departure from Bangkok, Thailand (we can assist with booking), Meals beyond above Itinerary, Beverages, Spending/Personal Money.

During tour airfares:

All airfares and taxes are estimated and subject to change without prior notice until the ticket is issued.

Luang Prabang - Bangkok
Bangkok Airways (PG)
Economy - Class
\$330

Bangkok - Koh Samui
Bangkok Airways (PG)
Economy - Class
\$215

Koh Samui - Bangkok
Bangkok Airways (PG)
Economy - Class
\$215





Our Land Cost Does Not Include:

- Air travel to Chiang Mai, and return from Bangkok or any airfares or departure taxes (estimated at \$1000).
- Meals other than specified in this itinerary.
- Pre-trip Medical Exam (recommended).
- Insurance, emergency medical and evacuation insurance is required. (We recommend <http://my.travelinsure.com/himalayanht>).
- Early hotel check-in or late check-out.
- Passport and visa fees or photos.
- Visits/entrance fees not specified in this itinerary.
- Tips for drivers, porters, or others.
- Drinks, laundry, telephone calls, and personal expenses.
- Any other items not specified in this itinerary.

Travel Details:

When arranging your flights to and from Asia, please note these dates and logistics: All participants must arrive in Chiang Mai no later than February 23, 2020. The tour ends after breakfast in Bangkok on March 5, 2020. Please book your flight any time on March 5 or on or after 11:55 p.m. on March 7th if you are going on the beach extension. Please ask any questions before purchasing your international tickets and make sure the tour is confirmed to operate. Flight times to Thailand will vary significantly based on your origin city as well as the airline(s) being chosen. For some, air travel starting from the U.S. could begin two days before the meeting date. Crossing the International Date Line can make it seem as if you 'lose' a day flying, but on your return home, you may arrive on the same day, often just hours later than the local time of your departure. You are welcome to travel early or stay for extra days at the end. We can arrange additional nights for you. Contact us with your specific interests and budget - we can help make it happen!

— Effie Fletcher, June 2019
Himalayan High Treks, CST 2085690-40

Our Land Cost Includes:

- Professional tour leader throughout.
- Trip preparation assistance, including full itinerary, trip notes, packing list, and more.
- Accommodation in Twin/Double rooms at hotels as mentioned (or similar). Single supplement additional.
- Daily meals, as mentioned in the above-detailed program.
- All transfers and excursions by private air-conditioned vehicles with driver, or by boat as mentioned.
- Entrance fee for the visits specified in this itinerary.
- English-speaking local guides are provided at each location.

