



Isaan

Siam's "ancient soul" is a fitting way to describe Isaan. With a curious cultural identity of its own, Isaan is the beating heart of Thai music, food, culture and traditions.

This is where history unfolds, flavours flow, music moves and colours shine... more vividly.

Experience geological sites, traditional crafts, river scenes, countryside cycling, local music and cultural performances, all while letting the exciting regional food nourish your spirit!

The days will be adventurous, the evenings indulgent and the nights comfortable. Buckle up for a dive into remote lands rarely visited by even the most seasoned travelers.

Come and indulge in Thailand's ancient soul...



Loei

Day 1

Today we begin the adventure, traveling from Bangkok to Loei. The one-hour flight departs from Suvarnabhumi at the reasonable hour of 10:00 (TBD).

The Isaan plateau begins a few hours northeast of Bangkok, where you'll find yourself surrounded by weathered façades and colourful people, as if you had been plunked down in a Thai cowboy film set.

From frantic twenty-first century Bangkok we travel into Loei's highlands to explore ancient caves and spiritual serenity. Then a short drive to a 150-year-old traditional village for private lunch and a local museum visit. This is a community working hard to preserve its traditional culture – very charming, and superb local food!

We'll enjoy a walk through the village before heading to our home for the next three nights – Mekong Villas, on the banks of the storied river.



Dress recommendation:

- walking shoes for forest walk/cave exploration
- appropriate temple wear
- NOTE: late afternoon we may get a "bit wet" on the Mekong River, so a handy pair of shorts + sandals/flip-flops would be great to have!



Loei

Day 1 - Continued

After getting settled, we'll enjoy some sundowner drinks with the incredible Mekong River views.

We have a special dinner planned in the garden tonight, a sumptuous catered meal hosted by one of Isaan's most desired chefs from the legendary Samuay & Sons Restaurant.

Did we mention the evenings might be indulgent?

Dinner entertainment will be a showcase of some of Isaan's cultural heritage, from traditional folk music to ghostly spirits and theatrics, while bar hostesses keep our glasses filled from the private bar.

It will be a feast for both the belly and soul!



Heli-rockin' Isaan!

Day 2

Isaan is a vast plateau with historic and notable sites quite distant from each other, there's no better way to travel between them than by air!

Today we'll get an early start to board our private helicopter and fly through three provinces over scenic landscape to find some of Isaan's most famous sites and iconic landmarks.

We'll fly east to Bueng Kan, a lesser-known province blessed with stunning geological formations and surreal temples, as well as being one of the most densely forested Isaan provinces.

We'll break up the day with on-the-ground experiences starting with Three Whale Rock where our Park Ranger friends will take us up to the giant jutting rock formations along forest paths, and then a short flight to Wat Phu Tok, for a stunning 500-step to the spiritual summit, per its design.

- Our request to mount speakers to the heli's landing skids was denied, so we had to nix Flight of the Valkryries.



Dress recommendation:

- comfortable, cool active wear
- walking shoes + hat (it's hot up here, baby)
- appropriate temple wear (sarong, shoulder scarf)



Richard Barrow in Mon

Down to Earth

Day 2 - Continued

Returning west, we'll fly to ancient Lanna-Isaan Wang Nam Mok village in Sri Chiang Mai, Nong Khai for an inspired walk in a village doing its best to preserve a centuries-old heritage.

We'll be honored by the elders' invitation to join a special ceremony, a traditional welcome practiced for generations, and which requires donning local dress.

This community's balanced mixture of nature conservation and cultural heritage is an inspiration to all, and this is one of the most charming hidden gems in Isaan.

Helicopter back to Pak Chom town, and a late afternoon massage treatment at our villa.



Isaan Isaan Night!

Day 2 - Continued

Tonight we'll pull out all the stops. During a catered dinner at the villas by one of Chiang Khan's top restaurants, we'll be entertained in true eclectic Isaan fashion.

We'll be treated to folksy *Mo Lam* which does battle with country music style *Luk Thung* singers accompanied by costumed dancers and colourful Isaan regalia.

These music genres are unique to Isaan, though slowly fading with Thailand's urbanisation. Tonight's medley of Isaan musical mayhem is a tribute to this unique art form, and we're doing our small part to help in their preservation, while having a bit of fun too!

The evening may get progressively rowdier, joined by an Isaan-Lao country funk band, more dancers and attentive bar hostesses.

Timing for today:

07:30 - breakfast at your villa

08:15 - depart for helipad (10 mins)

08:30 - heli departs: 3 Whale Rock, Wat Phu Tok,
Wang Nam Mok, Pak Chom

17:00 - heli returns to Pak Chom, 10-mins to villa

18:30 - sunset drinks and an evening of Isaan-ity!



Cycle Chiang Khan

Day 3

Today we'll head to historic Chiang Khan for early morning alms with monks (if you desire), a local tradition to be embraced. Then drive 45-mins east to the confluence of the Mekong and Huang Rivers, the last point on the Isaan map where we see the Mekong, to begin a cycling adventure through the Isaan countryside, farming villages, and lunch in a local ethnic village.

Afternoon options galore: explore the old town, last-minute shopping in Isaan's most photographed town, or watch the Mekong slowly slip past with a coffee (or G&T!) on your deck. Late afternoon massage time at your villa.



- cycling is flat 15-20kms, supported. Ok, there are 3 hills, each short, and there's no shame in walking up.



Dress recommendation:

- cycling dress: shorts/light shirt, athletic shoes
- sunglasses, etc.
- helmets will be provided



Chiang Khan

Day 3 - Continued

We'll leave the villa before sunset to catch the amber glows in one of Southeast Asia's most charming towns, then a great local dinner at the top restaurant in town tonight.

Timing for today:

(07:00 - depart for alms-giving in town if keen)

09:00 - depart for cycling (drive 45 mins first)

12:00 - local village lunch, this is the real Thailand!

15:00 - return to villa for an afternoon siesta

17:30 - drive to old town for sunset stroll, night market, dinner in town.



Departure

Day 4

Take the morning leisurely with breakfast on your deck anytime between 08:00 - 09:30 am. We'll depart at 10:00 am for the airport, a 90-minute drive.

All great adventures eventually come to an end. The flight to Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport will take around one hour.

We hope, and believe, that a special sense of place and spirit from Isaan will stay in your hearts and memories forever!

Timing for today:

08:00 - 09:30 - breakfast as you wish

10:00 - depart for Loei Airport

12:00 - flight departure

13:00 - arrive Suvarnabhumi Airport

Accommodation

Mekong Villas - Pak Chom, Loei

The Isaan sister to Chakrabongse Villas, this is Loei's most fabulous private residence reflecting the area's unspoiled beauty, and boasting panoramic views of the Mekong and Laos



Icons of Isaan

Facts, Figures and Folk Culture

The name "Isaan" comes from Sanskrit ईशान्य *īśānya* "Northeast"

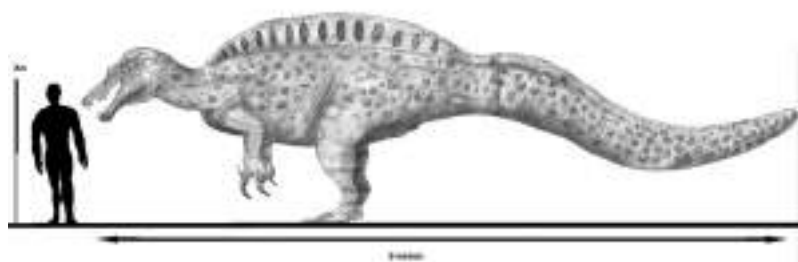
Located on the Khorat Plateau in the northeastern region of Thailand, Isaan consists of 20 provinces and accounts for one-third of Thailand's land area.

The Lao Isaan people are of Lao ethnic origin, but Isaan has been incorporated as a territory into the modern Thai state.

Isaan is Thailand's poorest region, home to one-third of Thailand's population of 67 million, but contributes only ten per cent to the national GDP.



Siamosaurus suteethorni



Facts, Figures and Folk Culture Continued...



Isaan is known for its spicy food, colourful costumes, rice fields, crazy farm vehicles, fantastic festivals, animism, prehistoric sites, dinosaurs, love of water buffalos and music...

Folksy **Mo Lam** songs are accompanied by mouth organs, three-string 'Lao' guitar and percussion and typically feature a theme of unrequited love and often reflect the difficulties of life in rural Isaan, leavened with wry humor. Whereas **Luk Thung** is a bit more country music style where singers sing poetic lyrics that mirror rural lifestyle, cultural traits and social patterns, often accompanied by a dance. While these traditional genres are fading in the countryside, they are now being incorporated into international fusion movements.



