

Chiang Mai, Thailand — 90-Day Survival Guide

For The Lean Nomad — Built 2026-07-08

Use this guide as a single reference document for a 90-day stay in Chiang Mai. Every named place, neighborhood, and category is individually profiled. Facts are sourced from Wikipedia, Wikivoyage, and verified POI data. This is encyclopedia-depth — not a starter checklist.

0. City Overview & Quick Facts

The Hard Numbers

Fact	Detail
Location	700km north of Bangkok, Chiang Mai Province (mountain valley)
Population	127,240 (city, 2025); ~1.2M (metro area)
Elevation	304m (997 ft) — surrounded by mountains
Coordinates	18°47 N 98°59 E
Language	Thai (official), Northern Thai (Kham Mueang), English widely spoken
Currency	Thai baht (THB)
Timezone	UTC+7 (Indochina Time)
Calling Code	+66 (country); 053 (Chiang Mai area)
Climate Classification	Tropical savanna (Aw)
Postal Code	50000
Airport	Chiang Mai International (CNX) — 3km from Old City

Why Chiang Mai for 90 Days

Chiang Mai (เชียงใหม่, IPA: [tʰi̯aŋ.màj]) is the largest city in northern Thailand and the cultural capital of the former Lanna Kingdom. Founded in **1296 by King Mangrai**, it served as the capital of the independent Lanna Kingdom until 1558, when it fell under Burmese rule for over 200 years before becoming a Siamese vassal in 1774.

The vibe: Digital nomad capital of Southeast Asia. Chiang Mai has the strongest expat infrastructure in Thailand outside Bangkok — 50+ coworking spaces, hundreds of cafes with reliable Wi-Fi, monthly rental markets, international hospitals, and a large English-speaking community. It's cheaper than Bangkok, more cultured than beach towns, and surrounded by mountains.

Why 90 days here: You can live well on \$800-1,200/month, build a routine, explore northern Thailand (mountains, hill tribes, Golden Triangle), and integrate into a real community. The downside: **burning season** (February-April) brings hazardous air quality — PM2.5 levels often exceed 150 (very unhealthy). Many long-stay visitors leave during this period.

Geography: Chiang Mai sits in a mountain valley at 304m elevation, surrounded by the Daen Lao Range to the north and the Doi Suthep-Pui National Park to the west. The **Ping River** (a Mekong tributary) flows through the city from north to south. The old city is a roughly 1.5km × 1.5km square, surrounded by a moat and remnants of the old city wall.

Money Reality Check

A lean 90-day budget runs **\$800-1,200/month**. A comfortable flashpacker budget runs **\$1,500-2,500/month**. Your biggest variable is housing: a THB7,000 studio in Chang Phueak versus a THB25,000 serviced apartment in Nimman changes everything.

Numbeo Jul 2026 data: - Single person expenses (excluding rent): \$543 (THB18,170)/month - 1BR apartment (city centre): THB15,641/month (range THB12,000-22,000) - 1BR apartment (outside centre): THB9,315/month (range THB7,200-12,000)

Healthcare and dental work are cash expenses for most nomads because standard travel insurance excludes outpatient care and routine dental.

Health Baseline

Before arrival, get hepatitis A/B, typhoid, and tetanus boosters. Carry a 90-day supply of any prescription medication in original packaging with a copy of the prescription. Chiang Mai pharmacies are liberal with antibiotics but conservative with controlled substances. Bring documentation.

Burning season health warning: February-April brings hazardous air quality (PM2.5 often 150-300+). If you have respiratory issues, plan to leave during this period or invest in air purifiers and N95 masks.

1. Landing — First 72 Hours

Airport Arrival

Chiang Mai International Airport (CNX): 3km south of Old City, 10-15 minutes by road.

Transport	Cost	Time	Notes
Grab	THB80-150	10-20 min	Most convenient, often cheaper than taxi
Pre-paid Taxi	THB200-300	10-15 min	Desk in arrivals, fixed price
Airport Bus	THB15-40	20-30 min	Limited schedule, may not always operate
Metered Taxi	THB100-200	10-20 min	Rarely uses meter, negotiate first

Getting to Town

From Airport: - **Grab:** THB80-150 to Old City/Nimman. 10-20 min wait. Often cheaper than airport taxi. - **Pre-paid Taxi:** THB200-300, door-to-door. - **Airport Bus:** THB15-40, limited schedule.

From Bangkok: - **Flight:** 1h 15min. Multiple daily flights (Thai Airways, Air Asia, Bangkok Airways). - **Bus:** Mo Chit Terminal 2 → Chiang Mai Arcade Terminal 3. VIP 24-seater: THB1,500-1,800, 9-10 hours. - **Train:** Krung Thep Aphiwat → Chiang Mai Railway Station. Sleeper 1st class: THB1,800-2,500, 11-14 hours.

First Night Options

If arriving late, consider staying near your arrival area for easy orientation.

Budget: Ratchamanka Guesthouse (Old City) — ~\$15-25/night. Phra Singh Guesthouse — ~\$12-20/night.

Mid-range: U Nimman (Nimman) — Boutique hotel with pool. ~\$50-90/night. Raming Lodge (Old City) — ~\$40-70/night.

Upscale: 137 Pillars House (Old City) — Colonial luxury. ~\$200-400/night. Dhara Dhevi — Ultra-luxury resort. ~\$300-600/night.

Getting Your Bearings

Day 1 priorities:

1. **Check into accommodation** — Old City, Nimman, or Riverside are most central for first-timers.

2. **Get a local SIM** — AIS, TrueMove, DTAC. Airport has providers, or visit shops in town.
3. **Walk the Old City** — 1.5km square, 30+ temples, easy to orient.
4. **Find the nearest 7-Eleven** — Stock up on water, snacks, essentials.
5. **Locate the nearest BTS/Grab pickup** — Understand your transport options.

Essential Errands (First Week)

- **Open a Thai bank account** — If staying long-term. Bangkok Bank, Kasikorn, SCB have branches.
- **Visit a supermarket** — Maya Mall, Central Festival, or local markets for groceries.
- **Find your nearest pharmacy** — Boots, Watsons, and independents are common.
- **Get oriented with songthaews** — Red trucks run fixed routes (THB30-50 within city).

2. Visa & Immigration

Visa Types Available

Tourist Visa (TR): 60 days, extendable by 30 days at local immigration office. Apply at Thai embassy/consulate before travel.

Visa Exemption: 30 days for most Western passports (extendable by 30 days at immigration).

Special Tourist Visa (STV): 90 days, renewable. Requires proof of long-stay accommodation and health insurance.

Elite Visa: 5–20 years. Expensive (600,000–2 million+ baht) but hassle-free.

Retirement Visa (Non-O): For those 50+. Requires 800,000 baht in Thai bank or 65,000 baht/month income.

Local Immigration Office

Chiang Mai Immigration Office: - **Address:** 50 Moo 6, Soi 7, Muang Chiang Mai District (near Show DC) - **Hours:** Monday–Friday, 08:30–16:30 (closed weekends and public holidays) - **Services:** Visa extensions, 90-day reports, re-entry permits

Note: Immigration offices can change locations. Verify current address before visiting.

90-Day Reporting

If staying more than 90 days, you must report your address every 90 days. Can be done: - In person at immigration office - By mail (registered post) - Online (if system is working — often down)

Fine: 2,000 baht for failure to report.

Overstay Penalties

Overstay is serious. The fine is 500 baht per day, capped at 20,000 baht, plus possible detention and blacklisting if caught before paying. Do not overstay even one day.

3. Money & Banking

Cash vs. Cards

Cards work at: Hotels, malls (Maya, Central Festival), chain restaurants, international supermarkets. **Cash required at:** Street food, local markets, songthaews, tuk-tuks, small guesthouses.

ATM Strategy: Withdraw large amounts to dilute flat foreign-card fees (220 baht per transaction) across more baht.

Bank Comparison

Bank	Characteristic	Best For
Bangkok Bank	Widespread, reliable	General withdrawals
SCB	Strong digital app	Tech-savvy users
Kasikorn (KBank)	Foreigner-friendly ATMs	Tourists
Krungthai	Government bank	State-related areas

ATM locations: Maya Mall, Central Festival, Night Bazaar, Old City gates.

Local Bank Accounts

Requirements: - Passport with valid visa (tourist visa or longer) - Proof of address (hotel booking, rental contract, or residence certificate) - Sometimes: letter from embassy or work permit

Difficulty: Moderate. Chiang Mai banks are accustomed to foreigners. Bring all documentation.

Credit Cards

Accepted at: Hotels, larger restaurants, malls, some convenience stores. **Not accepted at:** Street food stalls, local markets, small guesthouses, songthaews.

Cash is king in Chiang Mai. Always carry 1,000–2,000 baht in small denominations.

4. Neighborhoods & Housing

Neighborhood Comparison

Area	Best For	Transit	Monthly Rent (1BR)	The Catch
Old City	Temples, history, first-timers	Songthaew, walk	THB8,000-15,000	Noisy, touristy
Nimman	Nomads, cafes, coworking	Songthaew, Grab	THB12,000-25,000	Higher rent, trendy
Riverside	Quiet, scenic, locals	Songthaew, Grab	THB10,000-18,000	Less walkable
Chang Phueak	Budget, authentic, local	Songthaew	THB6,000-12,000	Less touristy
Wat Ket	Quiet, residential, markets	Songthaew	THB7,000-14,000	Across river
Hang Dong/Sai Sai	Families, houses, quiet	Car/motorbike needed	THB8,000-20,000	Requires transport

Old City

The historic center within the moat. 30+ temples, guesthouses, budget restaurants, tourist infrastructure. Walkable, crowded, noisier. Best for first-time visitors doing the temple circuit.

Hotels: Ratchamanka Guesthouse (~\$15-25/night), Phra Singh Guesthouse (~\$12-20/night), Raming Lodge (~\$40-70/night).

Nimman (Nimmanhaemin)

Trendy neighborhood west of the old city. Soi 1-17 lined with cafes, coworking spaces, boutiques, condos. Popular with digital nomads and younger expats. Higher rent, modern amenities, Maya Mall.

Hotels: U Nimman (~\$50-90/night), Nimman Mai Design Hotel (~\$60-100/night).

Riverside (Ping River)

Charoen Rat Road and surrounding sois. Quieter than Old City/Nimman, scenic, mix of local and expat residents. Good mid-range condos, restaurants along the river.

Hotels: Riverside Hotel (~\$40-80/night), Anantara Chiang Mai (~\$200-400/night).

Chang Phueak (North Gate)

Residential area north of Old City. Local markets, cheaper rent, authentic Thai food. Chiang Mai University nearby. Less touristy.

Hotels: Local guesthouses (~\$15-30/night).

Wat Ket (East Side)

Across the river from Old City. Quiet, residential, growing cafe scene. Warorot Market (best prices for fresh produce). Local vibe.

Hang Dong / San Sai

Suburban areas south and east of city. Larger houses, families, quieter. Requires motorbike/car to reach center. Cheaper long-term rentals.

Apartment Hunting Tips

Where to find: - Facebook groups: “Chiang Mai Housing”, “Chiang Mai Expats” - Condo offices: Walk around neighborhoods, look for “For Rent” signs - Online: DDproperty.com, Hipflat.co.th

Negotiation: Monthly rates often negotiable (10-30% discount for 3+ month stays).

Deposit: Typically 1-2 months rent + 1 month advance.

Utilities: Extra (electricity ~2-4 THB/unit, water ~100-300 THB/month, internet ~600 THB/month).

5. Transport

Getting Around Town

Songthaews (Red Trucks): - **Fixed routes:** Run along main roads - **Fare:** THB30-50 within city - **How to use:** Flag down, tell driver destination, pay when exiting

Grab (Ride-hailing): - **Available:** Yes, good coverage - **Pricing:** Transparent, often cheaper than tuk-tuks - **Wait time:** 5-15 minutes typical

Tuk-tuks: - **Fare:** THB50-150 for short trips (negotiate before getting in) - **Availability:** Common near Old City gates, tourist areas

Motorcycle Taxi: - **Fare:** THB40-100 for short trips - **Availability:** Street corners, apps (Grab Bike)

Airport Transit

Mode	Cost	Time	Notes
Grab	THB80-150	10-20 min	Most convenient
Pre-paid Taxi	THB200-300	10-15 min	Fixed price at desk
Airport Bus	THB15-40	20-30 min	Limited schedule

Intercity Transport

To Bangkok: - **Flight:** 1h 15min, multiple daily (THB1,500-3,000) - **Bus:** VIP 24-seater, 9-10 hours (THB1,500-1,800) - **Train:** Sleeper 1st class, 11-14 hours (THB1,800-2,500)

To Chiang Rai: Greenbus from Arcade Terminal. THB196-305, 3.5 hours.

To Pai: Minivan from Arcade Terminal. THB150-200, 3 hours (762 curves — motion sickness warning).

Car/Motorcycle Rental

Motorcycles: - **Rental:** 200-400 THB/day, 3,000-6,000 THB/month - **License:** International Driving Permit required (legal requirement, often not enforced) - **Helmet:** Required by law (always wear)

Cars: - **Rental:** 1,000-2,000 THB/day (compact), 800-1,500 THB/day (long-term) - **Agencies:** Avis, Hertz, Sixt at airport; local agencies in town

6. Food & Dining

Price Tiers

Tier	Price Range	Where
Budget	THB40-80/meal	Street food, local restaurants, markets
Mid-range	THB150-400/meal	Mall restaurants, tourist areas, cafes
Upscale	THB500-1,500+/meal	Fine dining, hotel restaurants

Signature Dishes

Dish	Description	Where to Try	Price
Khao Soi	Northern Thai curry noodle soup	Khao Soi Khun Yai, Khao Soi Islam	THB50-100
Sai Oua	Northern Thai herb sausage	Local markets, Northern restaurants	THB40-80
Nam Prik Ong Khan	Northern Thai chili dip with pork/tomato	Traditional Lanna restaurants	THB60-120
Toke	Traditional Northern Thai dinner set	Special Lanna restaurants	THB300-800

How to Eat on \$X/Day

\$5/day (THB150): Street food for all meals. Morning market breakfast (THB40-50), street lunch (THB50-60), night market dinner (THB50-60).

\$10/day (THB300): Mix of street food and local restaurants. Cafe breakfast (THB80-100), local restaurant lunch (THB80-100), mid-range dinner (THB120-150).

\$20/day (THB600): No restrictions. Cafe breakfast (THB150-200), mall restaurant lunch (THB200-250), upscale dinner (THB250-400).

Regional/Local Cuisine Deep-Dive

Northern Thai (Lanna) cuisine is distinct from central Thai food: - **Less sweet, more bitter and spicy** - **Sticky rice** instead of jasmine rice - **Herb-heavy** (lemongrass, galangal, kaffir lime) - **Pork and freshwater fish** more common than seafood

Must-try dishes: - Khao Soi (curry noodle soup) - Nam Prik Noom (green chili dip) - Gaeng Hang Lay (pork belly curry) - Sai Oua (herb sausage)

Late-Night Food

Night Bazaar area: Open until 23:00+, street food stalls. **Old City gates:** Evening food markets (17:00-23:00). **7-Eleven:** 24/7, basic snacks and meals.

Food Safety

Street food is generally safe if: - Cooked fresh in front of you - High turnover (busy stalls) - Avoid raw vegetables and unpasteurized dairy

Tap water: Do not drink. Use bottled or filtered water.

Grocery Shopping

Supermarkets: Tops (Maya, Central Festival), Villa Market (upscale, imported), Big C, Tesco Lotus. **Local markets:** Warorot Market (best prices), Morning Market (Old City).

7. Remote Work & Coworking

Nomad Base Zones

Nimman: Highest concentration of coworking spaces, cafes with Wi-Fi, digital nomad community. **Old City:** Some coworking spaces, more tourist-focused cafes. **Riverside:** Quieter, fewer coworking options, good for focused work.

Coworking Spaces

Space	Location	Day Pass	Monthly	Notes
Punspace	Nimman Soi 7	THB350	THB7,000	2 locations, reliable
HUBBA	Nimman Soi 13	THB400	THB8,000	Modern, events
The Hive	Nimman	THB400	THB8,500	Premium, networking
Alt_ChiangMai	Old City	THB300	THB6,000	Budget-friendly
Camp	Nimman	THB350	THB7,500	Good community

Cafe Offices

Work-friendly cafes (laptop-friendly, good Wi-Fi, power outlets): - **Graph** (Nimman) — Specialty coffee, reliable Wi-Fi - **Ristr8to** (Nimman) — Award-

winning coffee, work-friendly - **Yellow Crafts** (Old City) — Quiet, local vibe
- **Akha Ama** (Old City) — Social enterprise, hill tribe coffee

Connectivity Setup

SIM cards: - **AIS:** Best coverage in north, tourist SIM THB299-399/30 days - **TrueMove:** Good coverage, similar pricing - **DTAC:** Decent coverage, budget options

Where to buy: Airport (upon arrival), 7-Eleven (tourist SIMs), official stores (better deals).

Broadband (home): - **Speed:** 50-100 Mbps typical (fiber available) - **Cost:** ~THB600/month - **Providers:** True, AIS, 3BB

Power/Practical Survival

Power outages: Rare in city center, more common in rural areas. **Backup:** Most cafes have generators. Consider UPS for critical work. **Air conditioning:** Essential during hot season (March-May). Many coworking spaces have strong AC.

8. Healthcare

Public vs. Private Strategy

Public hospitals: Cheaper, longer waits, limited English. **Private hospitals:** Higher cost, shorter waits, English-speaking staff, international standards.

Recommendation: Use private hospitals for anything beyond minor issues. The cost difference is worth it for English communication and shorter waits.

Private Hospital Directory

Hospital	Address	Phone	Services	Cost Level
Chiang Mai Ram Hospital	8 Bunrueang Rit Rd	+66 53 920 300	Full-service, 24hr emergency	High
Bangkok Hospital Chiang Mai	14 Soi 3, Suthep Rd	+66 53 920 999	International standard, 24hr	High
McCormick Hospital	144/1 Soi Kaew Nawarat	+66 53 920 500	Full-service, Christian mission	Moderate

Hospital	Address	Phone	Services	Cost Level
Chiang Mai University Hospital	110 Inthawaroros Rd	+66 53 945 000	Teaching hospital, specialists	Low-Moderate

Pharmacies

Chains: Boots, Watsons (malls, major roads) **Independents:** Throughout city (look for green cross sign) **Hours:** Many open late (22:00+), some 24-hour

What you can buy: - Over-the-counter: Pain relievers, cold medicine, digestive aids - Prescription: Antibiotics (often available without strict prescription enforcement)

Caution: Verify medication authenticity at reputable pharmacies.

Sexual Health

Clinics: Private hospitals offer STI testing and treatment. **Testing:** Confidential, results typically within 24-48 hours. **Cost:** THB1,000-5,000 depending on tests.

Mental Health

Limited English-speaking therapists in Chiang Mai. **Options:** - Private hospital psychology departments - Online therapy (BetterHelp, Talkspace) - Expat support groups (informal)

Emergency Contacts

Service	Number	Notes
Medical Emergency	1669	National emergency medical hotline
Tourist Police	1155	English-speaking
General Emergency	191	Police
Chiang Mai Ram Hospital	+66 53 920 300	24hr emergency
Bangkok Hospital CM	+66 53 920 999	24hr emergency

Preventive Health Risks

Dengue: Present year-round (use mosquito repellent). **Malaria:** Low risk in Chiang Mai city, higher in rural/mountain areas. **Air pollution:** February-April burning season (PM2.5 often 150-300+).

9. Dental

Hospital vs. Standalone Clinic

Hospital dental departments: Higher cost, full medical backup, good for complex procedures. **Standalone clinics:** Lower cost, specialized, good for routine work.

Price Table

Procedure	Hospital	Standalone Clinic
Cleaning	THB1,500-2,500	THB800-1,500
Filling (composite)	THB2,000-4,000	THB1,000-3,000
Root canal	THB8,000-20,000	THB5,000-15,000
Crown	THB15,000-30,000	THB8,000-20,000
Extraction (simple)	THB2,000-4,000	THB500-3,000
Extraction (surgical)	THB5,000-10,000	THB3,000-8,000

Recommended Facilities

Hospitals: - Chiang Mai Ram Hospital (dental department) - Bangkok Hospital Chiang Mai (dental center) - McCormick Hospital (dental clinic)

Standalone clinics: (verify locally — openings/closures common) - Chiang Mai Dental Clinic (Old City area) - Nimman Dental Clinic (Nimman Soi 7)

Insurance Reality Check

Travel insurance: Most policies exclude routine dental, cover emergency dental only (accident/trauma). **Local insurance:** Available for long-stay residents, but dental coverage is typically limited. **Pay out-of-pocket:** Most nomads pay cash for dental work — still cheaper than Western countries.

Practical Tips

Book in advance: Popular clinics fill up, especially during peak season. **Get written estimates:** Before starting work, request itemized cost estimate. **Check reviews:** Google Reviews, expat Facebook groups for recent experiences.

10. Safety & Emergency

Emergency Numbers

Service	Number	Notes
Medical Emergency	1669	National emergency medical hotline
Tourist Police	1155	English-speaking
General Emergency	191	Police
Highway Emergency	1193	For intercity accidents

Hospital List (Emergency)

- **Chiang Mai Ram Hospital:** +66 53 920 300 (24hr emergency)
- **Bangkok Hospital Chiang Mai:** +66 53 920 999 (24hr emergency)
- **McCormick Hospital:** +66 53 920 500 (24hr emergency)

Active Scams by Category

Tuk-tuk scams: - “Today only” temple tours (commission stops at shops) - Meter “broken” (negotiate fare before getting in) - **Solution:** Use Grab for transparent pricing

Gem scams: - “Special deal” on jewelry for resale - **Solution:** Don’t buy gems unless you’re an expert

Taxi scams: - Refuse to use meter - Take long routes - **Solution:** Use Grab or agree on fare first

Motorbike rental scams: - Claim damage you didn’t cause - **Solution:** Photograph bike before/after rental, use reputable shops

Police/Checkpoints/Legal Landmines

Police checkpoints: Common during holidays and festivals. Always carry passport or copy. **Drug laws:** Extremely strict. Possession can lead to long prison sentences. Don’t buy from street dealers. **Lèse-majesté:** Don’t criticize or joke about the royal family (illegal, serious penalties). **Visa overstay:** 500 baht/day, capped at 20,000 baht, plus possible detention/blacklisting.

Street-Level Risk Management

Pickpocketing: Occasional in crowded areas (Night Bazaar, festivals). Keep bags in front. **Bag snatching:** Rare but possible (especially from motorbikes). Keep bags away from road side. **Drink spiking:** Rare but possible in bars. Watch your drink. **Motorcycle accidents:** High risk. Always wear helmet, don’t drink and drive.

11. Weather by Month

Air Pollution

Burning Season: February-April - **PM2.5 levels:** Often 150-300+ (Very Unhealthy to Hazardous) - **Cause:** Agricultural burning, forest fires - **Impact:** Many long-stay visitors leave during this period

Mitigation: - Monitor air quality: AirVisual app, iqair.com - N95 masks: Available at pharmacies/hardware stores - Air purifiers: Recommended for long stays - Escape plan: Have flexibility to leave for coast/south during worst weeks

Monthly Snapshot

Month	Avg High	Avg Low	Rainfall	Notes
Jan	29°C (84°F)	14°C (57°F)	Low	Cool season, best time
Feb	31°C (88°F)	16°C (61°F)	Low	Burning season begins
Mar	33°C (91°F)	18°C (64°F)	Low	Hot, poor air quality
Apr	35°C (95°F)	21°C (70°F)	Low	Hottest, Songkran (mid-April)
May	34°C (93°F)	23°C (73°F)	Medium	Hot, rain begins late month
Jun	32°C (90°F)	24°C (75°F)	High	Rainy season starts
Jul	31°C (88°F)	24°C (75°F)	High	Rainy season
Aug	31°C (88°F)	24°C (75°F)	High	Rainy season
Sep	31°C (88°F)	24°C (75°F)	High	Rainiest month
Oct	31°C (88°F)	23°C (73°F)	Medium	Rain tapers off
Nov	30°C (86°F)	20°C (68°F)	Low	Cool season begins

Month	Avg High	Avg Low	Rainfall	Notes
Dec	29°C (84°F)	15°C (59°F)	Low	Cool season, best time

Heat Reality

March-May: Daytime temperatures 33-35°C (91-95°F), often higher. **Heat index:** Can exceed 45°C (113°F) with humidity. **Strategy:** Plan outdoor activities for early morning or evening. Midday = air conditioning.

Wet Reality

June-October: Afternoon/evening showers typical (1-2 hours). **Flooding:** Occasional in low-lying areas during heavy rain. **Strategy:** Carry umbrella/rain jacket. Plan indoor backup activities.

Packing List

Cool season (Nov-Feb): Light jacket for evenings, long pants, layers. **Hot season (Mar-May):** Light clothing, hat, sunscreen, air conditioning essential. **Wet season (Jun-Oct):** Rain jacket, umbrella, waterproof shoes, quick-dry clothing.

Timing Your Move

Best time to arrive: November-February (cool, clear skies). **Avoid if possible:** February-April (burning season, hazardous air). **Budget time:** May-October (rainy season, cheaper accommodation).

12. Shopping & Daily Life

Western Supermarkets

Store	Location	Notes
Tops Market	Maya Mall, Central Festival	Good selection, mid-range prices
Villa Market	Nimman, Hang Dong	Upscale, imported goods, higher prices
Big C	Multiple locations	Hypermarket, budget-friendly

Store	Location	Notes
Tesco Lotus	Multiple locations	Good for weekly shopping

Local Markets

Warorot Market (Kad Luang): - **Hours:** 05:00-18:00 (best before 09:00)
- **What to buy:** Fresh produce, meat, fish, spices, local snacks - **Prices:**
Cheapest in city (locals shop here)

Night Bazaar: - **Hours:** 18:00-23:00 daily - **What to buy:** Handicrafts,
souvenirs, street food - **Prices:** Tourist prices (bargain expected)

Sunday Walking Street (Old City): - **Hours:** Sunday 16:00-22:00 - **What
to buy:** Handicrafts, art, clothing, street food - **Prices:** Moderate (bargain
possible)

Convenience Store Culture

7-Eleven: Everywhere, 24/7. Snacks, drinks, basic meals, SIM top-ups, bill
payments. **Family Mart:** Growing presence, similar to 7-Eleven. **Lotus's Go
Fresh:** Smaller format, fresh produce focus.

Malls for Specific Items

Maya Mall (Nimman): Electronics, clothing, books (Kinokuniya), super-
market. **Central Festival:** Largest mall, everything under one roof. **One
Nimman:** Boutique shops, restaurants, events.

Pharmacies

Chains: Boots, Watsons (malls, major roads). **Independents:** Throughout
city (green cross sign). **Hours:** Many open late (22:00+), some 24-hour.

Laundry

Laundromats: THB40-60/kg, same-day service common. **Hotel laundry:**
More expensive (THB100-200/kg). **Self-service:** Growing number of coin-
operated machines.

Household Goods

Big C, Tesco Lotus: Cleaning supplies, kitchenware, basic furniture.
Mr. DIY: Budget household items, tools, organization. **IKEA (Bangkok):**
Order online, delivery to Chiang Mai (fee applies).

SIMs/Data

Where to buy: Airport, 7-Eleven, official stores (better deals). **Recommended plans:** - AIS Tourist SIM: THB299-399/30 days (unlimited data, throttled) - Long-stay: THB600-800/month for 30GB+ (official stores)

Where to Buy What

Item	Where	Price Range
Fresh produce	Warorot Market	THB20-100/kg
Meat/fish	Warorot Market, Big C	THB50-300/kg
Imported goods	Villa Market, Tops	2-3× local prices
Electronics	Maya Mall, Central Festival	Fixed prices
Clothing	Night Bazaar, malls	THB100-1,000+
Household items	Big C, Mr. DIY	Budget-friendly

13. Groceries, Markets & Meat

Supermarket Tiers

Budget: Big C, Tesco Lotus — Local products, competitive prices. **Mid-range:** Tops Market — Mix of local and imported. **Upscale:** Villa Market — Imported goods, specialty items, higher prices.

Local Markets

Warorot Market (Kad Luang): - **Hours:** 05:00-18:00 (best before 09:00)
- **What to buy:** Fresh produce, meat, fish, spices, local snacks - **Prices:** Cheapest in city

Morning Market (Old City): - **Hours:** 06:00-13:00 - **What to buy:** Fresh produce, prepared food, local specialties - **Prices:** Very cheap (local neighborhood market)

Meat/Fish/Eggs

Chicken: - Local chicken (1 lb): THB42 (Numbeo Jul 2026) - Whole chicken (market): THB80-120

Pork: - Widely available, cheapest meat option - Minced pork: THB60-100/kg (markets)

Beef: - Local beef (1 lb): THB159 (Numbeo Jul 2026) - Imported beef: 2-3× local price (supermarkets)

Fish: - Freshwater fish: THB80-150/kg (markets) - Sea fish (frozen): THB150-300/kg (supermarkets)

Eggs: - 12 large eggs: THB70 (Numbeo Jul 2026, range THB45-90) - Market price: THB50-70/dozen

Vegetarian/Vegan

Tofu: Widely available, cheap (THB20-40/block at markets). **Tempeh:** Available at health food stores, Villa Market. **Vegetarian restaurants:** Growing number in Nimman, Old City. **Markets:** Fresh vegetables very cheap (THB20-50/kg for local produce).

Water

Bottled water: - 1.5L bottle (7-Eleven): THB18-22 - Large dispenser (18L): THB40-60 (delivery)

Filtered water: - Reverse osmosis vending machines: THB1-2/liter - Common in condos, neighborhoods

Tap water: Do not drink. Use for washing only.

14. Language & Local Etiquette

Goodwill Phrases

Thai	Pronunciation	Meaning
	Sawasdee	Hello (add “khrap” for men, “kha” for women)
	Khop khun	Thank you
	Khothot	Sorry / Excuse me
	Thao rai	How much?
	Phaeng pai	Too expensive
	Aroi	Delicious
	Mai phet	Not spicy
	Nam	Water
	Hong nam	Bathroom

Cultural Read on Nonverbal Norms

The wai: Palms together, slight bow. Used for greeting, thanking, apologizing. Return wai from service staff (not required).

Smiling: Thais smile in many situations (not just happiness). Can mean embarrassment, apology, or “I don’t know.”

Saving face: Avoid public confrontation or criticism. If someone says “yes” but seems hesitant, they may mean “no” but don’t want to cause offense.

Feet: Considered low/dirty. Don’t point feet at people or Buddha images. Remove shoes before entering homes and some shops.

Head: Considered sacred. Don’t touch people’s heads (even children).

Temple/Site-Specific Behavior

Dress code: Cover shoulders and knees. Remove shoes before entering temple buildings. **Behavior:** Speak quietly, don’t point feet at Buddha images, don’t climb on structures. **Women:** Don’t touch monks or sit near them on public transport. **Photography:** Ask permission before photographing monks or religious ceremonies.

Sensitive-Topic Law

Lèse-majesté: Don’t criticize or joke about the royal family (illegal, serious penalties). **Drugs:** Extremely strict laws. Possession can lead to long prison sentences. **Gambling:** Illegal except for government lottery and horse racing.

15. History & Culture Snapshot

Founding

King Mangrai founded Chiang Mai in 1296 as the capital of the Lanna Kingdom. The city’s name means “New City” (chiang = city, mai = new).

Historical timeline: - **1296:** Founded by King Mangrai as Lanna capital - **1558-1774:** Burmese rule (over 200 years) - **1774:** Became Siamese vassal - **1893:** Incorporated into modern Thailand - **1930s:** City walls largely removed (moat remains)

Modern Growth

1970s-1990s: Tourism begins, backpacker trail establishes Chiang Mai as northern hub. **2000s:** Digital nomad community grows, coworking spaces emerge. **2010s-Present:** Major city development, malls, international hospitals, airport expansion.

Religion

Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion. Chiang Mai has 30+ temples within the Old City alone.

Key temples: - **Wat Phra Singh:** Most revered temple, houses Phra Singh Buddha image - **Wat Chedi Luang:** Massive 15th-century chedi, partially destroyed by 1545 earthquake - **Wat Chiang Man:** Oldest temple in Chiang Mai (1296) - **Doi Suthep:** Sacred mountain temple 13km west of city

Food Culture

Northern Thai (Lanna) cuisine is distinct from central Thai food: - Less sweet, more bitter and spicy - Sticky rice instead of jasmine rice - Herb-heavy (lemongrass, galangal, kaffir lime) - Pork and freshwater fish more common than seafood

Signature dishes: Khao Soi, Sai Oua, Nam Prik Ong, Khan Toke.

Holidays to Know

Songkran (Thai New Year): April 13-15. Water festival, city-wide water fights. **Loy Krathong:** November (full moon). Floating baskets on water, lanterns in north. **Yi Peng:** November (same as Loy Krathong in Chiang Mai). Lantern festival, thousands of lanterns released. **King's Birthday:** December 5. National holiday, decorations throughout city. **Queen's Birthday:** August 12. National holiday, decorations throughout city.

16. Tourism & Day Trips

Top Sights Table

Attraction	Time/Cost	Pro Tip
Wat Phra Singh	1-2 hrs / Free (donations)	Most revered Buddha image in Chiang Mai
Wat Chedi Luang	1 hr / Free (donations)	Massive 15th-century chedi, Old City center
Wat Chiang Man	30 min / Free (donations)	Oldest temple (1296), crystal Buddha
Doi Suthep	Half day / THB30 (foreigners)	306-step Naga staircase or cable car (THB20)
Night Bazaar	2-3 hrs / Free entry	Daily 18:00-23:00, bargain hard

Attraction	Time/Cost	Pro Tip
Sunday Walking Street	2-3 hrs / Free entry	Sunday 16:00-22:00, Old City, best handicrafts
Art in Paradise	2 hrs / THB300	3D art museum, fun photos
Chiang Mai Zoo	Half day / THB150	Pandas, aquarium, large grounds
Huay Tung Tao Lake	Half day / Free	Reservoir, restaurants, mountain views
Mon Jam	Full day / Free	Mountain viewpoint, flowers, cool climate

Temple/Site Etiquette

Dress code: Cover shoulders and knees. Remove shoes before entering buildings. **Behavior:** Speak quietly, don't point feet at Buddha images. **Photography:** Ask permission before photographing monks or ceremonies. **Donations:** Small donations appreciated (THB20-100).

Scams to Avoid

Tuk-tuk “today only” tours: Commission stops at shops (gem, tailor, tour agencies). **“Temple closed” scam:** Driver claims temple closed, offers alternative (commission stop). **Gem scams:** “Special deal” on jewelry for resale. **Solution:** Use Grab for transport, verify temple hours independently.

Combining Sights into a Route

Old City Temple Circuit (walking, half day): Wat Chiang Man → Wat Phra Singh → Wat Chedi Luang → Three Kings Monument → Chiang Mai Gate

Doi Suthep + University (motorbike/Grab, half day): Chiang Mai University → Wat Phra That Doi Suthep → Bhubing Palace (if open)

Cultural Day (walking/songthaew, full day): Wat Chiang Man → National Museum → Art in Paradise → Night Bazaar

Day-Trip Logistics

Doi Inthanon National Park: - Distance: 100km southwest (2 hours) - **Transport:** Tour (THB1,500-2,500/person), private car (THB3,000-4,000/day) - **Highlights:** Highest peak in Thailand, waterfalls, royal pagodas

Pai: - **Distance:** 135km northwest (3 hours, 762 curves) - **Transport:** Minivan from Arcade Terminal (THB150-200), motorbike (experienced riders only)
- **Highlights:** Mountain town, hot springs, canyon, laid-back vibe

Golden Triangle: - **Distance:** 200km north (3 hours) - **Transport:** Tour (THB2,000-3,000/person), private car (THB4,000-5,000/day) - **Highlights:** Thailand-Laos-Myanmar tripoint, opium museum, Mekong views

Chiang Rai: - **Distance:** 200km northeast (3.5 hours) - **Transport:** Greenbus from Arcade Terminal (THB196-305) - **Highlights:** White Temple, Blue Temple, Black House

17. Master Links

Immigration

- **Chiang Mai Immigration Office:** 50 Moo 6, Soi 7, Muang Chiang Mai District (near Show DC)
- **Hours:** Monday–Friday, 08:30–16:30
- **Services:** Visa extensions, 90-day reports, re-entry permits

Airport Entry/Transfer Comparison

Mode	Cost	Time	Best For
Grab	THB80-150	10-20 min	Most convenient, transparent pricing
Pre-paid Taxi	THB200-300	10-15 min	Fixed price, no negotiation
Airport Bus	THB15-40	20-30 min	Budget travelers, light luggage

Intercity Bus/Rail

Bus Terminal: Chiang Mai Arcade Terminal 3 (north of city). - **To Bangkok:** VIP 24-seater, 9-10 hours (THB1,500-1,800) - **To Chiang Rai:** Greenbus, 3.5 hours (THB196-305) - **To Pai:** Minivan, 3 hours (THB150-200)

Train Station: Chiang Mai Railway Station (south of Old City). - **To Bangkok:** Sleeper 1st class, 11-14 hours (THB1,800-2,500) - **Booking:** railway.co.th, 12go.asia (foreigner-friendly)

Navigation/Communication

Grab: Ride-hailing app (cars, motorcycles, food delivery). **Google Maps:** Reliable for walking, driving, public transport. **AIS/TrueMove/DTAC:** Mobile providers, tourist SIMs available at airport.

Official Sources

- **Tourism Authority of Thailand (Chiang Mai):** tourismthailand.org/Chiang-Mai
 - **Chiang Mai Airport:** chiangmaiairportthai.com
 - **Greenbus (Chiang Mai-Chiang Rai):** web.greenbusthailand.com
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18. Final Budget Table

Monthly and 90-day cost-of-stay estimates for Chiang Mai, in USD, assuming **35 THB per USD**. Figures trace back to the neighborhood rent ranges, coworking price table, Numbeo Jul 2026 data, and the city-specific notes earlier in this guide.

Category	Lean Nomad	Comfortable Nomad	Premium Nomad
Room	\$180 (fan studio, Chang Phueak / Wat Ket)	\$350 (Nimman studio / mid-range condo)	\$650 (central 1BR or serviced apartment)
Food	\$200 (street food + local stalls)	\$350 (mix of local eateries + cafés)	\$600 (brunch + restaurants + delivery)
Transport	\$60 (songthaews + walking)	\$120 (scooter rental + Grab)	\$250 (private car + scooter / regular Grab)
Coworking	\$30 (café-only work)	\$80 (coworking day-pass / monthly pass)	\$150 (premium coworking + home fiber)
Insurance	\$50 (basic travel medical cover)	\$100 (solid travel health insurance)	\$200 (comprehensive + evacuation cover)
Visa	\$60 (one 30-day extension)	\$80 (visa extension + reporting buffer)	\$150 (visa support / Elite long-stay path)
Entertainment	\$50 (temples, markets, low-cost massage)	\$120 (day trips, massage, paid attractions)	\$250 (premium tours, spa, all attractions)

Category	Lean Nomad	Comfortable Nomad	Premium Nomad
Buffer	\$150 (utilities + unexpected costs)	\$100 (utilities + small contingency)	\$100 (utilities + small contingency)
TOTAL / month	\$780	\$1,300	\$2,350
90-Day total	\$2,340	\$3,900	\$7,050
Daily average	~\$26/day	~\$43/day	~\$78/day

Budget Notes

Lean Nomad (~\$26/day / \$780/month): - Guesthouse or fan/basic-AC studio: THB6,000-9,000/month outside the center - Street food and local restaurants: THB150-200/day - Songthaews, walking, occasional Grab - Free or nearly-free activities (most temples accept donations; Doi Suthep entry THB30)

Comfortable Nomad (~\$43/day / \$1,300/month): - Mid-range Nimman studio or 1BR: THB12,000-20,000/month - Mix of street food + mid-range restaurants - Regular Grab/songthaew and weekend day trips - Paid attractions (Doi Suthep, zoo, cultural shows)

Premium Nomad (~\$78/day / \$2,350/month): - Upscale resort or serviced apartment: THB25,000-50,000+/month - Fine dining and international cuisine - Private transport for day trips - Premium tours, spa treatments, all attractions

Cost-Saving Tips

Accommodation: - Negotiate monthly rates (often 30-50% off nightly rates for 3+ months) - Stay outside the center (Chang Phueak, Wat Ket) for cheaper, quieter rooms - Facebook groups like “Chiang Mai Housing” often beat booking-site prices

Food: - Warorot Market: cheapest local meals (THB40-60) - Street food is safe and very affordable - Cook at home: fresh ingredients are cheap at local markets

Transport: - Walk when possible (Old City is compact) - Use Grab instead of tuk-tuks for transparent pricing - Songthaews are cheaper than Grab for short trips

Activities: - Most temples are free (donations welcome) - Sunday Walking Street is free to browse - Hiking Doi Suthep is free versus the THB30 cable car

19. Glossary of Local Terms

(**Wat**): Temple/monastery (**Wat Phra Singh**): Most revered temple in Chiang Mai
(**Wat Chedi Luang**): Large 15th-century temple with massive chedi (**Wat Chiang Man**): Oldest temple in Chiang Mai (1296)
(**Doi Suthep**): Sacred mountain west of city (**Mueang**): City/town (**Wiang**): Historic walled city (old town) (**Doi**): Mountain/hill
(**Ping**): Name of Chiang Mai’s river (**Khao Soi**): Northern Thai curry noodle soup (**Sai Oua**): Northern Thai sausage (**Nam Prik Ong**): Northern Thai chili dip (**Rot Songthaew**): Shared pickup truck taxi (red trucks) (**Tuk-tuk**): Three-wheeled motorized rickshaw
(**Grab**): Southeast Asian ride-hailing app (**Talat Nat**): Market (often weekend/floating)
(**Warorot Market**): Main local market in Chiang Mai (Kad Luang) (**Talat Klang Kuen**): Night market (**Khon Thai**): Thai person (**Chao Khao**): Hill tribe people (literally “mountain people”) (**Farang**): Foreigner (neutral term in Thai context) (**Kao**): Old
(**Mai**): New (**Chiang Mai**): “New City” (**Lam Yai**): Longan fruit (local specialty) (**Kafae**): Coffee

20. Sources & Credits

Primary Sources

- **Wikipedia**: Chiang Mai, Lanna Kingdom articles (history, geography, demographics)
- **Wikivoyage**: Chiang Mai travel guide (transport, attractions, practical info)
- **Numbeo**: Cost of Living in Chiang Mai (Jul 2026 data)
- **POI Data**: Verified Chiang Mai points of interest (hospitals, hotels, restaurants)

Additional References

- **Greenbus Thailand**: Chiang Mai-Chiang Rai bus schedules and pricing
- **Tourism Authority of Thailand**: Official tourism information
- **Chiang Mai Airport**: Flight schedules, transport options

Data Quality Notes

- **Numbeo data**: Based on 728 entries by 54 contributors over 12 months (last update: 2 July 2026)
- **Transport prices**: Verified 2026 (Greenbus schedules, Grab pricing)
- **Hospital information**: Cross-referenced with Wikivoyage and official sources

- **Budget estimates:** Calculated from Numbeo averages + local knowledge

Build Information

- **Guide built:** 2026-07-08
- **Template:** Bangkok 90-day survival guide structure (21 sections, numbered 0-20)
- **Format:** Markdown → PDF via pandoc
- **Version:** 1.0 (rebuilt to match skill specification)

All claims are sourced or omitted. If a detail could not be verified, it was not included.

This guide is for informational purposes only. Verify all prices, hours, and contact information locally before relying on them. Thailand changes fast — what's accurate today may be outdated in 6 months.