

Chiang Mai Quick City Guide

At a Glance

Chiang Mai is northern Thailand's cultural capital and its best-known digital-nomad hub. Thai and Northern Thai (Kham Mueang) are the local languages; English works in hotels, hospitals, tourist restaurants, and most cafés. Currency is the Thai Baht (THB); plan on roughly **35 THB to \$1 USD**. The climate has three windows: November–February is cool, dry, and busy; March–April is hot and plagued by agricultural burning (hazardous PM2.5); May–October is rainy with afternoon downpours. Time zone is UTC+7 (ICT), calling code +66, power is 220V Type A/C plugs.

First 48 Hours

Hour 0–2: Land, cash, SIM. Chiang Mai International (CNX) is 3 km from the Old City. A Grab to Old City or Nimman costs THB 80–150 and takes 10–20 minutes; pre-paid taxis at arrivals run THB 200–300. Buy an AIS, TrueMove H, or DTAC tourist SIM at the airport (THB 299–399/30 days, passport required). Withdraw THB 5,000–10,000 at once to dilute the flat THB 220 foreign-card ATM fee.

Hour 2–6: Check in and eat. Drop bags in the Old City for temples and walkability, or in Nimman for cafés and coworking. Locate your nearest 7-Eleven, ATM, and main road. First meal: khao soi at Khao Soi Khun Yai (THB 60–80) or street food near Chiang Mai Gate (THB 40–60).

Day 1 evening: Head up Doi Suthep before 16:00 if the sky is clear. Grab to the base is THB 150–200; the cable car is THB 20 (the 306-step Naga staircase is free), temple entry is THB 30. Sunset views over the city are the payoff. Back in town, walk the Night Bazaar on Chang Khlan Road (18:00–23:00) — bargain from about 50% of the asking price.

Day 2 morning: Old City temple loop (3–4 hours): Wat Chiang Man (oldest, 1296), Wat Phra Singh, Wat Chedi Luang, the Three Kings Monument, then lunch at Chiang Mai Gate market.

Where to Stay

- **Old City — Best For:** Temple-hopping, first-timers, walkability; **Nightly USD:** \$15–50; **The Catch:** Tourist crowds, evening noise, no BTS
- **Nimman (Nimmanhaemin) — Best For:** Digital nomads, cafés, coworking; **Nightly USD:** \$40–110; **The Catch:** Higher rent, spread out, trendy bubble
- **Riverside (Ping River) — Best For:** Quiet, scenic, long-term; **Nightly USD:** \$30–90; **The Catch:** Less walkable, fewer transport options

- **Chang Phueak / Wat Ket** — **Best For:** Budget, local life, cheap eats; **Nightly USD:** \$12–40; **The Catch:** Outside the tourist core, fewer English menus

Specific hotel picks:

- **Ratchamanka Guesthouse** — clean budget in the Old City.
- **U Nimman** — mid-range design hotel at Maya Mall.
- **Nimman Mai Design Hotel** — solid boutique in the nomad zone.
- **Anantara Chiang Mai** — riverside splurge with resort grounds.

Getting Around

- **Songthaews (red trucks)** — Shared pickup trucks; flag them down and negotiate. Short hops THB 20–40. The cheapest way to move around the Old City and between Nimman and the center.
- **Grab / Bolt** — Ride-hailing with transparent pricing. Faster than songthaews but more expensive; great after dark or in burning season when you want sealed AC.
- **Scooter rental** — THB 2,000–3,500/month. Wear a helmet; police checkpoints are common. Only rent if you are experienced — Chiang Mai traffic is calmer than Bangkok but still unforgiving.
- **Walking** — The Old City is a 1.6 km square and walkable. Nimman is spread out; walking there in hot season is unpleasant.
- **Intercity** — Green Bus to Bangkok/Chiang Rai/Pai; book at greenthailand.com. Trains from Bangkok take 10–12 hours.

Eat This

- **Khao soi** — Curried egg-noodle soup, Chiang Mai’s signature dish (THB 50–90 at local shops, THB 120–200 at cafés).
- **Sai oua** — Northern Thai herb sausage, smoky and aromatic (THB 80–150 at markets).
- **Nam prik noom** — Roasted green-chili dip with raw vegetables and sticky rice (THB 40–80).
- **Gaeng hung lay** — Burmese-influenced pork belly curry, mild and rich (THB 80–150).
- **Khao man gai** — Thai-style Hainanese chicken rice (THB 50–80).
- **Som tam** — Green papaya salad; order “mai pet” if you want it mild (THB 40–70).
- **Mango sticky rice** — Classic dessert (THB 50–90).
- **Chiang Mai Gate night-market street food** — Best value food court in the city.

Top 10 Sight

Attraction	Time & Cost	Pro Tip
Doi Suthep Temple	2–3 hrs; THB 30 entry + THB 20 cable car	Arrive before 16:00 for sunset; take the Naga stairs for free
Old City temples (Wat Phra Singh, Wat Chedi Luang)	2–3 hrs; free–donation	Start at 08:00 to avoid tour buses
Sunday Walking Street	3–4 hrs; free	Temples close around it; arrive by 17:00
Night Bazaar	2 hrs; free	Bargain hard; better for souvenirs than food
Warorot Market (Kad Luang)	1–2 hrs; free	Best local prices on produce and street snacks
Elephant Nature Park (day trip)	Full day; ~THB 2,500–3,500	Book direct; ethical, no riding
Doi Inthanon National Park	Full day; THB 300 entry	Highest peak in Thailand; go with a guide or rental car
Sticky Waterfall (Bua Tong)	Half day; free	Climbable limestone; combine with a local tour
Bhubing Palace gardens	1–2 hrs; THB 50	Cooler than the city; good add-on to Doi Suthep
Wiang Kum Kam ancient city	2–3 hrs; free–small fee	Underground ruins just south of the city

Day Trips

- **Doi Inthanon** — Thailand’s highest peak, waterfalls, hill-tribe markets. Full day.
- **Pai** — Hippie mountain town 3 hours northwest; waterfalls, hot springs, canyon.
- **Chiang Dao** — Limestone caves and mountain views; 1.5 hours north.
- **Elephant Nature Park / ethically run sanctuaries** — Full-day volunteer experiences north of the city.

Safety & Etiquette

- **Very safe** for violent crime; main risk is traffic accidents. Wear a helmet on scooters.
- **Petty theft** can happen in crowded markets — keep bags in front of you.
- **Scams:** Tuk-tuk overcharging, gem scams, fake tour operators. Ignore “today only” deals.
- **Temple dress:** Cover shoulders and knees; remove shoes before entering temple buildings.
- **Monarchy:** Criticizing the royal family is illegal. Do not do it, even in private chat.
- **Air pollution:** February–April burning season can hit PM2.5 of 150–300+. Monitor AirVisual, wear N95 masks, and have an escape plan.
- **Emergency:** Tourist Police 1155, Medical 1669, Police 191.

Budget Snapshot

Tier	Daily	Weekly	14-Day
Lean Nomad	~\$26	~\$180	~\$360
Comfortable Nomad	~\$43	~\$300	~\$600
Premium Nomad	~\$78	~\$550	~\$1,100

Lean: guesthouse or fan room, street food, songthaews, free temples. **Comfortable:** Nimman studio, mix of street food and cafés, scooter or Grab, occasional paid attractions. **Premium:** serviced apartment or resort, restaurants and delivery, private transport, spa and tours.

Quick Links

- **Tourism Authority of Thailand:** <https://www.tourismthailand.org/>
- **Chiang Mai city government:** <http://www.cmcity.go.th/>
- **Airport:** <https://chiangmai.airportthai.co.th/>
- **Green Bus booking:** <https://web.greenbusthailand.com/>
- **Immigration (extensions, 90-day reports):** Promenada Mall, 2nd floor, +66 53-241-503
- **Full 90-Day Survival Guide:** [chiang-mai-90-day-survival-guide.pdf](#)

Quick City Guide for Chiang Mai, Thailand | For The Lean Nomad | 2026