

Chiang Rai Quick City Guide

At a Glance

Chiang Rai is northern Thailand's quiet, temple-rich counterweight to Chiang Mai. Thai and Northern Thai (Kham Mueang) are spoken; English works in hotels, hospitals, and tourist restaurants. Currency is the Thai Baht (THB); plan on roughly **35 THB to \$1 USD**. The climate mirrors Chiang Mai: November–February is cool and dry, March–April brings hazardous burning-season air, and May–October is rainy with afternoon downpours. Time zone UTC+7 (ICT), calling code +66, power 220V Type A/C plugs.

First 48 Hours

Hour 0–2: Land, cash, SIM. Chiang Rai International (CEI) is 10 km north of the city. A Grab to the center costs THB 200–300; an airport bus is THB 20 if it aligns with your flight. Buy an AIS, TrueMove H, or DTAC tourist SIM at the airport or a 7-Eleven (THB 299–399/30 days, passport required). Withdraw THB 5,000–10,000 at once to offset the flat THB 220 foreign-card ATM fee.

Hour 2–6: Check in and eat. Base yourself in the City Center for the Night Bazaar and temples, or along the Kok River for a quieter stay. Locate the nearest 7-Eleven, ATM, and main road. First meal: khao soi at a local shop (THB 50–80) or street food near the Morning Market (THB 40–60).

Day 1 evening: Walk the Night Bazaar on Thanalai Road (18:00–22:00) for handicrafts and snacks, or stroll the riverside after dinner. Keep the schedule light — you are acclimating to the heat.

Day 2 morning: White Temple (Wat Rong Khun) first thing. It is 13 km south of town; a Grab or songthaew is THB 200–300 each way. Arrive by 08:00 to beat the buses. Entry is THB 100. Back in town, hit the Black House (Baan Dam Museum) in the afternoon.

Where to Stay

- **City Center** — **Best For:** First-timers, Night Bazaar, temples; **Nightly USD:** \$15–45; **The Catch:** Touristy, noisier, limited charm
- **Riverside (Kok River)** — **Best For:** Quiet, scenic, long-term; **Nightly USD:** \$30–90; **The Catch:** Less walkable, fewer cheap eats
- **Old Bus Station Area** — **Best For:** Budget, local vibe; **Nightly USD:** \$12–35; **The Catch:** Outside the tourist core, fewer English menus
- **New Bus Station Area** — **Best For:** Transit access; **Nightly USD:** \$15–40; **The Catch:** 7 km from center, requires songthaew/taxi

Specific hotel picks:

- **Wangcome Hotel** — reliable mid-range in the City Center.
- **The Riverie by Katathani** — riverside option with resort feel.

- **Le Méridien Chiang Rai Resort** — upscale riverside splurge.
- **Local guesthouses near Old Bus Station** — cheapest beds in town.

Getting Around

- **Songthaews (red trucks)** — Flag down and negotiate. Short hops THB 20–40. The main way locals move around town.
- **Grab / Bolt** — More reliable than tuk-tuks after dark; prices are transparent.
- **Tuk-tuks** — Available but overcharge tourists; agree on a price before getting in.
- **Scooter rental** — THB 2,000–3,500/month. Wear a helmet. Roads are calmer than Chiang Mai but still require experience.
- **Day-trip transport** — Join a tour or hire a driver for the White Temple, Black House, Golden Triangle, and hill-tribe villages. Expect THB 1,500–2,500 for a full-day private driver.

Eat This

- **Khao soi** — Curried egg-noodle soup, northern Thailand’s signature dish (THB 50–90).
- **Sai oua** — Northern Thai herb sausage (THB 80–150 at markets).
- **Nam prik noom** — Roasted green-chili dip with sticky rice (THB 40–80).
- **Gaeng hung lay** — Burmese-influenced pork belly curry (THB 80–150).
- **Khao man gai** — Thai Hainanese chicken rice (THB 50–80).
- **Som tam** — Green papaya salad; ask “mai pet” for mild (THB 40–70).
- **Mango sticky rice** — Classic dessert (THB 50–90).
- **Morning Market street food** — Cheapest local meals in the city.

Top 10 Sight

Attraction	Time & Cost	Pro Tip
Wat Rong Khun (White Temple)	1.5–2 hrs; THB 100	Arrive at 08:00; 13 km south of town
Baan Dam Museum (Black House)	1.5–2 hrs; THB 80	Dark-art complex 10 km north; combine with White Temple on a loop
Wat Huay Pla Kang	1–1.5 hrs; free–small donation	Giant white Buddha and 9-tier pagoda on a hill
Chiang Rai Night Bazaar	1.5–2 hrs; free	Best after 19:00; bargain for handicrafts

Attraction	Time & Cost	Pro Tip
Clock Tower	15 min; free	Sound-and-light show at 19:00, 20:00, 21:00
Doi Chom Thong temple	1 hr; free	Hilltop temple with city views
Golden Triangle (day trip)	Full day; THB 1,500–2,500 tour	Laos/Myanmar/Thailand border viewpoint; Mekong boat optional
Hill-tribe villages (day trip)	Half–full day; varies	Book through ethical operators; avoid exploitative “human zoo” tours
Singha Park	2–3 hrs; ~THB 50	Tea plantations, cycling, hot-air balloons in season
Wat Phra Kaew (original Emerald Buddha temple)	45 min; THB 50	Historic temple in the Old City

Day Trips

- **White Temple + Black House loop** — Half day by scooter or hired driver; the two signature sights bracket the city.
- **Golden Triangle + Chiang Saen** — Full day to the Laos/Myanmar border, Mekong viewpoints, and ancient Chiang Saen ruins.
- **Mae Salong (Santikhiri)** — Chinese Yunnanese tea village in the mountains; 1.5 hours northwest.
- **Doi Tung Royal Villa + Mae Fah Luang Garden** — Palace, gardens, and hill-tribe development project; full day.

Safety & Etiquette

- **Very safe** for violent crime. Main risk is traffic accidents — wear a helmet on scooters.
- **Petty theft** is uncommon but keep bags secure in crowded markets.
- **Scams:** Tuk-tuk overcharging, inflated tour prices, fake gem or silk deals. Agree prices upfront.
- **Temple dress:** Cover shoulders and knees; remove shoes before entering temple buildings.
- **Monarchy:** Criticizing the royal family is illegal. Do not do it anywhere.
- **Air pollution:** February–April burning season can push PM2.5 to 150–300+. Monitor AirVisual, wear N95 masks, and have an escape plan.
- **Hill-tribe visits:** Choose community-run or nonprofit tours; avoid villages that exist mainly for tourist photos.

- **Emergency:** Tourist Police 1155, Medical 1669, Police 191.

Budget Snapshot

Tier	Daily	Weekly	14-Day
Lean Nomad	~\$20	~\$140	~\$280
Comfortable Nomad	~\$37	~\$260	~\$520
Premium Nomad	~\$69	~\$480	~\$960

Lean: guesthouse or fan room, street food, songthaews, free/low-cost temples.
Comfortable: mid-range condo or hotel, mix of street food and cafés, scooter or Grab, paid attractions. **Premium:** serviced apartment or resort, restaurants and delivery, private driver for day trips, spa and tours.

Quick Links

- **Tourism Authority of Thailand:** <https://www.tourismthailand.org/>
- **Chiang Rai city government:** <http://www.chiangrai.go.th/>
- **Airport:** <https://chiangrai.airportthai.co.th/>
- **White Temple:** <https://www.watrongkhun.org/>
- **Full 90-Day Survival Guide:** [chiang-rai-90-day-survival-guide.pdf](#)

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