



## CHRISTMAS IN THAILAND

### Classic Tour | 13 Days | Physical Level 1

Bangkok (3N) – Kanchanaburi (1N) – Chiang Rai (2N) – Hmong Hilltribe Lodge (1N) – Chiang Mai (3N)

A two-week journey from south to north, this perfect first-timer tour of Thailand encompasses all the top sights as well as venturing into less-explored areas. Explore pristine nature, learn to cook like a Thai, and immerse yourself local culture with a stay at a beautiful eco-lodge run by a local hill tribe community.

- Spend Christmas morning at an elephant sanctuary
- Tuck into Christmas dinner at a former colonial mansion
- Marvel at Bangkok's Grand Palace
- See the Bridge on the River Kwai
- Meet Hmong and Yao hill tribes
- Master Thai cuisine with a cooking class in Chiang Mai

## TOUR MAP

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## CLASSIC TOUR INCLUSIONS:

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- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking Local Guides
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants

The only things you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, meals not included, early check in or late check out and other items not specified on the itinerary.

## CLASSIC TOURS:

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These tours are designed for those who wish to see the iconic sites and magnificent treasures of Southeast Asia on an excellent value group tour whilst travelling with like-minded people. The tours are on a fully inclusive basis, so you'll travel with the assurance that all your arrangements are taken care of. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escorts and local guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

## PHYSICAL LEVEL 1:

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Our tours come with a physical rating to guide you in selecting a holiday that suits your comfort level. Joining any of our tours involves independent mobility and the ability to stay active throughout the day, which is essential for fully enjoying the unique charm of each destination.

'Christmas in Thailand' falls under a Physical Level 1 category. This indicates a level of fitness that allows you to comfortably remain on your feet with occasional rests. Expect to effortlessly navigate boarding and disembarking from various modes of transport, including coaches, trains, and boats. You'll be walking around remarkable sites and ascending steps to capture those awe-inspiring views!

Please Consider:

- Sightseeing may often involve walking for a reasonable duration, sometimes over multiple steps, or uneven surfaces.
- Boarding and alighting from various boat sizes independently is part of the experience.

Our National Escort is dedicated to providing a high level of service and support throughout your journey. However, their primary role is to manage the daily aspects of the tour. They are unable to offer extensive personal physical assistance. We kindly ask our travelers to be prepared for the physical aspects of the tour to ensure a comfortable and enjoyable experience for everyone.

## JOINING YOUR TOUR:

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The tour is 13 days in duration including international flights.

Travellers booked on a 'Land Only' package, the price includes your arrival/departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to our reservations team.

Join the tour on Day 1 in Bangkok and end the tour on Day 12 in Chiang Mai. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

## ITINERARY CHANGES:

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We intend to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours, or as dictated by local conditions. In these circumstances, we will endeavour to make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.



## DETAILED ITINERARY

**Days 1:**

**Fly to Bangkok**

**Meals: D**

You will be met at Bangkok Airport by your local guide or National Escort from Wendy Wu Tours. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, transfer approximately 1 hour to your hotel.



### Destination Information

**Bangkok** – Bangkok has been Thailand's dominant city since the 18th century. It was established as the capital after the former capital, Ayutthaya, was razed to the ground by the Burmese army. It was the centre point of the modernisation of Siam in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, leading the introduction of rail transport, the printing press, healthcare and utilities infrastructure. With a population of over 10 million, the fast pace of the city can be intense; however, beneath the hustle and bustle, there are many hidden gems waiting to be discovered.

**Day 2:**

**Bangkok**

**Meals: B, L, D**

Bangkok's dazzling neon signs, charming architecture, Thai cuisine and lively markets make for an exciting introduction to this fascinating country. Enjoy a Bangkok city tour. Tour the Grand Palace, Wat Pho and Chinatown before cruising down Chao Phraya River on a longboat to Pak Khlong Talaat Flower Market, whilst enjoying an alternative view of the city.



Sightseeing involves around 5 hours on foot today and involves hopping on and off the boats, often on unsteady and sometimes slippery surfaces, without handrails or assistance.

### Destination Information

**Wat Pho** – Wat Pho is one of Bangkok's oldest and largest temples. Experience the monk's chant as you explore the grounds of the complex, spread over some 80,000 square metres. The largest reclining Buddha and the largest collection of Buddha images are housed here.

**Grand Palace** - The Grand Palace is the city's most famous landmark. From 1782 until 1925, it was the official residence of the Kings of Siam; it is still used for many royal ceremonies and state events. It Palace are several impressive buildings, including the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

**Temple of the Emerald Buddha** – This royal chapel, found within the grounds of the Grand Palace, is one of the most sacred sites in Thailand. It houses a 26-inch-tall statue of the meditating Buddha; opinions differ as to whether it is made of jasper or jade, but it is believed to date to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is venerated as the palladium of Thailand; a protective figure which secures the country's safety.

**Pak Khlong Talat Flower Market** – The biggest wholesale and retail fresh flower market in Bangkok. Look out for the Phuang Malai garlands, often given as offerings or kept for good luck.

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**Day 3: Bangkok – Kanchanaburi**

Meals: B, L, D

Begin at the Maeklong Railway Market in Samut Songkram, and enjoy the spectacle as vendors quickly pack up their stalls to let trains pass directly through the market. Continue to Damnoen Saduak Floating Market, where you'll hop in small boats to explore the market's bustling canals.



Continue to Kanchanaburi, made famous by 'The Bridge on the River Kwai'. During the Japanese occupation of Thailand in WWII, tens of thousands of Allied POWs and Southeast Asian indentured labourers were forced to build the Thai-Burma Railway, often called the Death Railway; many of the prisoners died under the brutal conditions. Learn about their tragic story at the Thai-Burma Railway Museum, then pay respects to the victims at the Allied War Cemetery before checking in at your hotel.

### Destination Information

**Maeklong Railway Market** – A open-air market with a little difference – set on the railway track! Enjoy the unique experience as you see the experienced vendors quickly pack up their stores as the train approaches.

**Damnoen Saduak Floating Market** – One of Thailand's most famous floating markets, consisting of a maze of narrow canals lined with sampans (small wooden boats) piled high with colourful fruit, street food and souvenirs. Hop in a longtail boat and soak up the atmosphere, watching as the traders entertain passersby.

**Thai Burma Railway (Death Railway)** – Japan invaded the then-neutral Thailand in 1941, and subsequently invaded Burma (now Myanmar), with the aim of seizing control of Burma from the UK. Japan's project aimed to connect Bangkok to Rangoon (Yangon) by rail to supply their troops. To complete such a huge undertaking, Japan used the forced labour of approximately 250,000 Southeast Asian civilians and over 60,000 Allied prisoners of war, who suffered under the brutal conditions. Over 100,000 of the victims died in its construction.

**Allied War Cemetery** – The last resting place of almost 7,000 prisoners of war. The graves here belong to British, Dutch and Australian PoWs who died while building the railway; the remains of the Americans were repatriated.

**Day 4:****Kanchanaburi – Death Railway – Bangkok**

Meals: B, L, D

Visit Hellfire Pass, a dramatic part of the railway that literally cuts through mountain. Begin at the Hellfire Pass Memorial Museum, which tells the stories of human suffering at the hands of this engineering feat, before a 3 kilometre walk through the pass. Finally, take a short train journey on the Death Railway and see more of this beautiful valley before driving back to Bangkok.



*Please note the 3km walk will be on uneven ground, involves some steep steps and it is likely to be humid; bring mosquito repellent. If you do not wish to take part, you will still be able to see the pass from around 15 minutes' walk from the museum, and you may remain in the museum area independently.*

**Destination Information**

**Hellfire Pass** - Constructed for the Burma Railway during the Japanese occupation of Thailand in the Second World War. This remote part of the railway was particularly hard to build due to the scale of rock-cutting required. Its name derived from the eerie glow produced by the torches at night.

**Day 5:****Ayutthaya – Chiang Rai**

Meals: B, L, D

Drive 90 minutes east out of Bangkok to discover the historic ruins of Ayutthaya, the historic capital of Siam from 1350 until its destruction by Burmese invaders in 1767.



Begin at the restored Bang Pa-In Summer Palace, with its vast gardens, throne room, gilded pavilions and brightly-painted lookout tower. Continue to Wat Phra Sri Sanphet, with its three distinctive stupas, each of which hold the ashes of a king. Admire Wat Chaiwattanaram, built in 1630 to honour the king's mother. It was designed in the Khmer style and resembles a smaller Angkor. Sightseeing around Ayutthaya will involve around 3 hours on foot.

This afternoon, return to Bangkok for your 80-minute flight to Chiang Rai.

**Destination Information**

**Ayutthaya** - The capital of the Kingdom from 1350 until the Burmese invasion and destruction of 1767. On arrival, visit the largest temple of Wat Phra Si Sanphet, which was used as the Royal Temple Palace by several kings and which forbade monks to enter. See the impressive Wat Chai Wattanaram, built in the Khmer style, and continue to Bang Pa-In, which served as the summer palace for many Thai monarchs from the 17th century. This structure has a captivating collection of marvellous pavilions in a variety of Thai, Chinese, Italian and Victorian architectural styles.



**Day 6: Chiang Rai & The Golden Triangle**

Meals: B, L, D

This morning, head out to admire the area known as the 'Golden Triangle'; the point where the borders of Thailand, Laos and Myanmar meet. This area was once a hub of opium production, but since the 1970s, Thailand has been promoting local initiatives to enable locals to switch to other sources of income, such as tea, coffee and tourism.



Continue to Mae Sai, the northernmost point of Thailand and an important trading town on the Myanmar border. Return to Chiang Rai for dinner; afterwards, you may wish to explore the city's colourful night market.

**Destination Information**

**Chiang Rai Province** - The northernmost province of Thailand, sharing borders with Myanmar and Laos, and also one of the most ethnically diverse provinces in Thailand. The province is abundant with natural scenery; lush rice terraces, hills scattered with orchids and the mountains of Myanmar and Laos are visible in the distance.

**Chiang Rai City** – This provincial capital city has a population of some 200,000 residents. Founded in 1262, it is the charming older brother of Chiang Mai, with a wonderfully relaxed atmosphere.

**Day 7: Tribes & Tea Plantations in Mae Salong**

Meals: B, L, D

Drive 90 minutes through rolling countryside to Mae Salong Mountain, renowned for its hill tribes and tea plantations. From the base of the mountain, travel by truck to a plantation, where you will have an opportunity to sample the local tea.



Enjoy lunch at a mountaintop restaurant before visiting Doi Tung Palace and Mae Fah Luang Garden. Drive back to Chiang Rai this afternoon and check in to your hotel before heading out for dinner at a local restaurant.

**Destination Information**

**Doi Tung Palace and Mae Fah Luang Garden** – A beautiful royal villa and once the home of Princess Srinagarindra, the mother of King Bhumibol, the Doi Tung Palace blends Lanna and Swiss architecture. Sitting proudly atop the mountain, the palace lies within the pristine and colourful botanical gardens.

**Day 8: The White Temple & Hmong Hilltribe Lodge**

Meals: B, L, D

Depart Chiang Rai and take a short 30-minute drive to explore Wat Rong Khun, the bizarre and fascinating 'White Temple'. Stop at a local market before lunch.



This afternoon is spent crossing the countryside, passing forests, farms and villages to reach the Hmong Hilltribe Lodge. Here you will be guests of the Hmong community. The Lodge is made up of ten individual houses, each comprising of four separate bedrooms with private en-suite bathrooms, arranged around a central communal area. This evening, enjoy a barbecue dinner and a cultural show.

**Destination Information**

**White Temple** - One of the most recognisable temples in Thailand, the unorthodox White Temple is a contemporary Buddhist and Hindu temple, an ongoing project started by Thai artist Chalermchai Kositpipat in 1997. Inside, you will see a surprising fusion of imagery depicting the 'wickedness of mankind', with images ranging from nuclear warfare to (less explicity) fictional characters such as Freddy Krueger, all interspersed with the faces of fiery demons.

**Hmong Hilltribe Lodge** - Built in traditional Hmong style and managed by the Hmong community, with an eye for Western comforts. The guest cottages overlook the lush fields and hills surrounding the valley.

**Day 9: (Christmas Eve) Bamboo Rafting & Chiang Mai**

Meals: B, L, D

Depart the lodge and drive an hour north to Mae Daeng to enjoy a relaxed bamboo rafting trip on the Mae Daeng River. Sit back and enjoy the passing scenery as your boatman steers you along the river.



Afterwards, head to Chiang Mai and visit a social enterprise café. This little restaurant offers life-changing vocational training to reformed women from Chiang Mai's Correctional Institution. The skills they learn here enable them to reintegrate into society with the skills for a new career.

This afternoon, visit two of Chiang Mai's most important temples, Wat Chedi Luang and Wat Phra Singh.



### Destination Information

**Chiang Mai** - Nestled among high mountains, Chiang Mai is the largest and most culturally significant city in northern Thailand. The city was founded in 1296 and was the capital of the Lanna Kingdom after Chang Rai. During the 20th century, Chiang Mai became a thriving centre for handicraft pottery, weaving, silverwork and woodcarving; however tourism took over in the 1960s as the main source of income. Today, Chiang Mai is famous for its hilltribes, tea plantations and elephants.

#### **Day 10: (Christmas Day)**

#### **Elephant Rescue & Christmas Dinner**

Meals: B, L, D

Enjoy a wonderful start to Christmas Day – a visit to an elephant sanctuary! The centre is located in the beautiful Mesa valley and offers a peaceful retirement home for elephants rescued from illegal logging camps and elephant shows. Meet one of their caretakers, who will guide you through the centre, explaining about the centre and its inhabitants.



Return to Chiang Mai and freshen up at the hotel before this afternoon's Thai Christmas dinner at the lovely House by Ginger. This 1930s colonial mansion has been preserved as a stylish restaurant with a luxurious yet homely atmosphere.

This evening, return to the hotel and relax, or stay out in town and continue to celebrate at your leisure.

#### **Day 11: (Boxing Day)**

#### **Cooking Class & Wat Doi Suthep**

Meals: B, L, D

Spend Boxing Day morning at a cooking class, learning to cook traditional Thai cuisine and enjoy your creations for lunch. Later, drive to Wat Doi Suthep, a beautiful hilltop temple with panoramic views across the countryside. You will have the choice of climbing the Naga staircase (300 steps) or catching the cable car to visit the exquisite golden pagoda.



This evening, enjoy a typical Khantoke dinner while watching a performance of traditional song and dance from Northern Thailand by various hill tribes.

#### **Day 12-13:**

#### **Depart Chiang Mai**

Meals: B

You will be transferred from the hotel to the airport, according to the departure time of your international flight. Any time before your flight is at leisure. Fly overnight, arriving in Australia the following day.

*Check out is usually at noon – please contact our Reservations team if you would like to prebook Late Checkout. Please note: Only breakfast is provided on the group's day of departure.*

## CHRISTMAS IN THAILAND TRAVEL INFORMATION

### VISAS:

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Australian passport holders do not need a visa for Thailand if they are travelling for less than 30 days for tourist purposes.

Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back into Australia.

Please note the visa procedures and requirements may change at any time. These changes are often made by the relevant embassy or consulate, Wendy Wu Tours acts as a third party and has no influence on the process of a visa. Wendy Wu Tours does not accept responsibility for lost or undelivered items. All information with regards to visas will be updated regularly on our website as we find visas process' are changing on regular basis.

For the latest information on visa procedures, processing times and requirements, please kindly refer to our website <https://www.wendywutours.com.au/help-and-advice/passports-and-visas/>

### INSURANCE:

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We strongly recommend that you take out a policy as soon as you pay your deposit. Wendy Wu Tours cannot in any way be made liable for any additional cost incurred by the customer on any tour due to the customer not having adequate travel insurance.

We also encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the original.

### EATING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:

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Southeast Asia is home to an incredibly rich food history. The local cuisine is known for its intense flavours, spices and some of the freshest ingredients you can find. In general, meals include either rice or noodles and are packed full of flavour. Lemongrass, ginger, lime leaves, coriander, fish sauce and soy sauce are used in many local dishes. Whilst Southeast Asian food has a reputation for being hot and spicy, each region actually has its own distinct characteristics. Vietnam, for example, is perhaps best known for its fresh and aromatic dishes – relying heavily on flavours from fresh herbs such as mint, basil and dill.

When dining in Southeast Asia, although some restaurants have adopted a western approach to dining, expect some restaurants to follow the traditional communal style of eating. Typically, this will mean each diner has their own small bowl and may serve themselves from a variety of shared dishes. At some local restaurants, appetizers and main courses might be served when they are ready instead of following a particular order.

Determining when it's appropriate to use chopsticks, forks or spoons can be challenging for some travellers, even other Asians, as each country has different customs. In Vietnam, dishes are normally placed in the centre and people serve food for themselves with their own chopsticks and bowl. Usually, chopsticks or other utensils are provided to scoop the food into your bowl to prevent your own chopsticks from touching the food that remains on the table. Dining in Southeast Asia is fairly casual with not too many rules. Leaving food on the plate is not considered rude.

Those with dietary requirements - just make sure to inform your booking agent of any specific requirements well in advance of your trip. Please read your travel guide, which you will receive with your final documents for more information about eating in Southeast Asia. We recommend that when it comes to Asia food, you stay open minded and try to be adventurous!

### **GROUP SIZE:**

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Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by a national escort. There will usually be no more than 28 travellers in a Classic Tour group, although you may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with local guides only.

### **ACCOMMODATION:**

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Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In more remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four-star standard, but please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between Australia and Vietnam. All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning, TV and telephone. Plumbing and electricity supplies can be erratic and quite often the power in hotel rooms is turned off while guests are out of the room. If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your National Escort/Local Guide. Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs.

Solo travellers: If you are a solo traveller and willing to share a room, you will not have to pay a single supplement for any hotel rooms. Willing to share single travellers booking within 75 days of the first day of a group tour will be subject to availability. If no suitable match is available at time of booking you will be required to pay all single supplements.



### PORTERAGE:

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Please be aware that portering is not included on our tours in Southeast Asia. You will therefore need to be able to handle your own luggage within the hotel and when using transportation like trains and coaches.

### TRANSPORT:

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**Coaches:** Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. **However, mini buses may be used for smaller groups (under 10 passengers).** Roads in Vietnam have generally improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the itinerary are approximations only.

**Planes:** Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines.

### TIPPING POLICY:

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Tipping while on holiday is common in most parts of the world and Southeast Asia is no exception. However, it is not always clear who it is appropriate to tip and how much. Furthermore, travellers may not have the right amounts of cash available at the right time. In order to avoid any inconvenience Wendy Wu Tours operates a tipping policy where a stated amount is given to your national escort at the beginning of your tour and tips are disbursed to local guides and drivers throughout your tour. The amount is designed to be at a reasonable level for travellers while being fair to the local people and includes a gratuity for the national escort.

If you are travelling in a smaller group with local guides only, then tipping is paid in each destination. To be fair to the guides we ask for slightly higher amounts per traveller with small groups.

We generally find that most customers appreciate the convenience of our tipping policy but we do recognize that it may not suit everyone. However, as this is a group tour we ask that everyone follows the same protocol to be fair to other group members and to ensure smooth operation of your tour.

### DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:

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Although Southeast Asia is developing quickly, it still lacks the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in Australia. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in Australia; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. All of our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from your National Escort or Local Guides.

### **SOUVENIRS:**

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We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs, so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions which demonstrate a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone, so we aim to take you to places, which hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

### **LUGGAGE:**

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All travellers are limited to two items of luggage each: a suitcase with a maximum weight of 20kg and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of 5kg. It is essential that your luggage is lockable. Please note that authorities will only allow bottles onto the aircraft if they have been checked in as main baggage. Bottles in hand luggage may be confiscated.

### **PERSONAL EXPENSES:**

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You will need to take some extra money to cover drinks, laundry and souvenirs, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Based on the advice of previous customers an approximate amount of \$300AUD per person, per week should be sufficient; however, for those that can't resist a bargain or may wish to participate in all of the optional excursions, consider allocating a higher amount.

### **CLIMBING STEPS:**

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Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps. These palaces were built to provide defense against potential invaders so nearly all of them stand on top of a hill, while the interiors have layers of narrow hallways and steps to slow down the advance of enemies once they were inside. The steps tend to be quite large, not level and sometimes without handrails. Hindu and Buddhist temples or pagodas also tend to be built at an elevation, as this is the most auspicious position according to ancient beliefs. This means you sometimes need to walk from the bus park to the entrance, and/or need to climb some steps inside.

People with knee or hip injuries, who have poor balance or are otherwise unable to complete these activities independently should consider the suitability of this itinerary carefully.

### **VACCINATIONS AND YOUR HEALTH:**

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We recommend that you contact either your GP or Travelvax (1300 360 164) for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Travelvax has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful [www.travelvax.com.au](http://www.travelvax.com.au)

**BEFORE YOU LEAVE:**

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We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au) as in the event of an emergency, Australian Consular assistance will be more readily available. You can also access the Australian Government's travel advisory service for up to date information about your destination on the same website.

**AFTER YOUR BOOKING:**

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Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice including a visa application form (if applicable), and a help sheet. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

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