

Thailand Birding & Nature

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



Feb. 27 – Mar. 14, 2019

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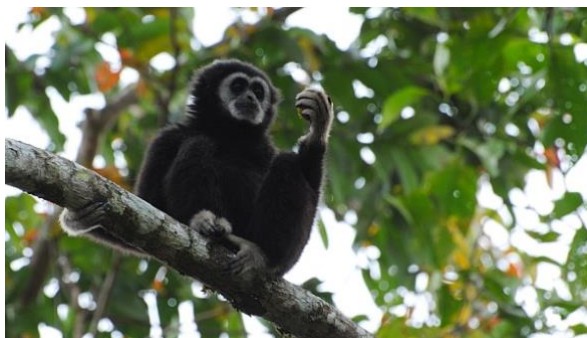
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Naturalist Journeys, LLC



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Thailand, often called the “Land of Smiles,” is a country of great natural beauty with important national parks and abundant birding. This NEW Naturalist Journeys adventure lets you explore with experts: visit mudflats teeming with thousands of migratory shorebirds, misty montane forests alive with flocks of sunbirds and laughingthrushes, and verdant lowland forests that ring with the calls of colorful broadbills and hornbills. Thailand is also a vital wintering ground for a wide variety of migrants from Siberia and China, which we see on our February visit. There is no better introduction to birding in the eastern part of Asia.

Our tour focuses on two provinces in Thailand. Chiang Mai province in the north sports the southern mountains of the Himalayas. The other province is Petchaburi, just west of Bangkok. Shorebirds fill the salt pans along its coastline, offering some of the best shorebirding on Earth. The star here is the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Kaeng Krachan National Park in its interior is the largest and most biodiverse in the region.

Imagine a Great Hornbill, the size of a swan, plane overhead; a Blue Pitta, intricately patterned, appear like a jewel from a thicket; or a Red-headed Trogon, painted in crimson, sit stoically on a branch. At Kaeng Krachan National Park there is a good chance for mammals: Leopard, White-handed Gibbon, and Asian Elephant are all possible.

Tour Highlights

- Explore Doi Inthanon, birding forests of the tallest mountain in Thailand (over 8,000 feet) for colorful birds typical of the Himalayas such as Chestnut-vented Nuthatch, Yellow-cheeked Tit, Large Niltava, and Green-tailed Sunbird
- Wander through a hill-tribe market in the northern mountains for artisanal crafts and other cultural items
- Seek out jewel-like pittas in the undergrowth at Kaeng Krachan, birds so beautiful that they inspired a man’s obsession to see every one of these elusive avian gems
- Marvel at the sheer number and diversity of shorebirds at Pak Thale, while learning about migration and conservation issues facing endangered species like Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Nordmann’s Greenshank, and Chinese Egret
- Enjoy Thailand’s famous cuisine, known for its enthusiastic use of fresh herbs and spices

Tour Summary

15-Day / 14-Night Thailand Birding & Nature Tour with Carlos Sanchez & Peg Abbott

\$4590, from Chiang Mai

Arrival Airport is Chiang Mai International (CNX); Departure Airport is Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok (BKK)

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Itinerary



Wed., Feb. 27 Arrival in Chiang Mai

Our tour officially starts today. Many flights route to Chiang Mai (CNX) through San Francisco and Seoul, Korea (ICN) but you may also look at other routings, including coming north from Bangkok. Our travel agent can be very helpful, and we pay the basic ticket fee. Please let us know if you would like us to connect you with her.

Representatives from our local company meet you at the Chiang Mai International Airport for our transfer to our modern Amora Tapae Hotel in Chiang Mai, a bustling and traditional Thai city that was once the seat of the Lanna Kingdom. Known for its abundance of intricate and ornate temples and bustling markets, Chiang Mai is a fun place to explore should you choose to come in early.

This evening we enjoy a welcome dinner with an orientation as the excitement builds for the days ahead. Our boutique hotel is located at an entrance to the old city and its setting and hospitality set a great tone to start our tour.

Accommodations at Amora Tapae Hotel

We recommend that you arrive a day or two early in Chiang Mai or Bangkok to adjust before starting the tour. There are regular and inexpensive direct flights from Bangkok to Chiang Mai.

Thurs., Feb. 28 Chiang Mai & Transfer to Doi Ang Khang

After a delicious early morning breakfast at the Amora Hotel, we drive a short distance to Huay Tung Tao, a large recreational park and reservoir with a mixed mosaic of woodlands and farmlands. The

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reservoir is lined with quaint grass huts and lush green hills back the scene. Species we hope to see here include some real gems: White-crested Laughingthrush, Rufous Treepie, Black-collared Starling, and Red-billed Blue Magpie. There can be a few avian surprises here too, and it is a pleasant introduction to birding in this country.

After a few hours, we drive to Doi Ang Khang near the Thai/Myanmar border. This mountainous area of lush forests, terraced farmland, and hill tribe villages offers some of the most spectacular scenery in the country, ecologically a part of the Himalayan foothills. Here we get our first taste of northern Thailand's montane species: White-tailed Robin, Silver-eared Mesia, Japanese Tit, and more are all possible here. We also take a stroll through a hill tribe market, where we can glimpse into the lives of the local people.

Our hotel has a balcony with vistas and bird feeders, a welcoming spot to let the birds come to us and enjoy! We stay in comfortable mountain cabins, with flowering trees at an elevation of 6500 ft. *Accommodations at Ban Luang Resort (B,L,D)*

Fri., Mar. 1 Doi Ang Kang & Doi Lang

After breakfast, we continue our exploration of this verdant massif in search of specialties that are easier to see here than elsewhere in Thailand. We venture down (or up) a few trails and around a campsite in search of such enticing species as Mountain Bamboo-Partridge, Crested Finchbill, Scarlet-faced Liocichla, and many others.

At around lunch time, we continue our journey to Doi Lang. Lying on the shoulder of Thailand's second highest peak — Doi Pha Hom Pok — this site is part of the most extensive remaining tract of evergreen hill forest in the region. As we walk the trails, we watch for a multitude of unique species of Himalayan and Chinese affinities, making it one of the most popular sites in the entire country for birdwatchers. On our first afternoon here, we stop by stake-outs for some of these: the tiny but oh-so-blue Ultramarine Flycatcher, the bizarre Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler, the adorable Spot-breasted Parrotbill, and others.

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Our hotel features comfortable chalets in an orchard of mango and lychee trees along a tranquil river.

Accommodations at Thatorn Garden Home (B,L,D)

Sat., Mar. 2 Doi Lang

Here at these high elevations, the air is clear and crisp and the early morning birding activity is terrific. We spend the entire morning on the east side of the mountain in search of a colorful and memorable assortment of birds, including Himalayan Bluetail, Large Niltava, Whiskered Yuhina, and Black-eared Shrike-babbler (actually an Asian vireo!).

After having a picnic lunch with a view and sharing a few moments of our morning here, we meander down the mountain for some afternoon birding in the rice paddies of Thatorn. Perhaps due to the long presence of farming in the region, a wide variety of birds have adapted to the habitat here: Pied Harrier, Citrine Wagtail, Green Sandpiper, and perhaps even the endangered Yellow-breasted Bunting are all possible.

Accommodations at Thatorn Garden Home (B,L,D)

Sun., Mar. 3 Doi Lang

On our second full day at Doi Lang, we drive up the west slope in the early morning hours in hopes of finding the incomparable Hume's Pheasant. This large forest pheasant dressed in rich chestnut, metallic blue, and white occurs only along a narrow band of montane forest through China, India, Myanmar, and Thailand (and this is arguably the best place in the world to see it). Another key species we look for today is the endangered Giant Nuthatch, the largest nuthatch species in the world at about the size of a European Starling.

We should encounter many other species while we search for these two charismatic birds, and montane feeding flocks can include Black-throated Tit, Golden Babbler, Stripe-breasted Woodpecker, Maroon Oriole, Blue-winged Minla, and many more.

Accommodations at the Tangerine Villa (B,L,D)

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Mon., Mar. 4 Fang Hot Springs & Mae Hia Agricultural College

We enjoy a nice and easy morning today with a visit to nearby Fang Hot Springs, known to be a reliable place for Spot-winged Grosbeak and a couple of river specialists — Plumbeous Redstart and White-capped Redstart. Here boulders dot an open green space surrounded by forest; plumes of steam rise from the ground in a whimsical geologic display. The hot springs themselves (numbering around fifty in all) are a reminder of the geologic forces that ultimately created these mountains. After some birding, we can enjoy some iced coffee and admire the lovely scenery of this site.

In the afternoon, we journey back to Chiang Mai to explore Mae Hia Agricultural College. This college includes areas of farmland, grassland, and scrub that host several local species such as Burmese Shrike and Wire-tailed Swallow.

Accommodations at Amora Tapae Hotel in Chiang Mai (B,L,D)

Tues., Mar. 5 Doi Inthanon National Park

Nicknamed the “roof of Thailand,” Doi Inthanon (ca. 8400 feet) is so high and so cold that local tourists flock to the summit on cold winter mornings to see frost — a novel experience to many local residents here who have never seen ice or snow! The road that winds up this magnificent granite mountain also happens to transect a diverse variety of habitats, including dry dipterocarp woodland, mixed deciduous forest, pine forest, and montane forest. By remaining in the lowlands as our base, we explore the various elevations and their associated habitats in search of their own characteristic bird life— the park is home to some 380 species of birds!

The drive from Chiang Mai to Doi Inthanon takes about an hour. Once inside the national park, we stroll through moss-clad trees and drop by a picturesque waterfall where the running water attracts the delightful White-capped Redstart and monochromatic Slaty-backed Forktail. Further up along the mountain, gently sloping forest trails often host busy feeding flocks, which may contain Clicking Shrike-Babbler, Yellow-cheeked Tit, and Rufous-backed Sibia.

Our hotel is surrounded by nature in a beautiful location.

Accommodations at Inthanon Highland Resort (B,L,D)

Wed., Mar. 6 Doi Inthanon National Park

A cool and crisp morning at the summit of Doi Inthanon starts off our day. The birding starts right from the parking lot, where the vegetation along the edges attracts many of the bolder mountain residents such as Silver-eared Laughingthrush, Green-tailed Sunbird, and Dark-backed Sibia. The Ang Ka Boardwalk nearby transects a bog full of trees festooned with moss. Within this magical

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environment, we hope to see some of the more secretive denizens of this mountain: Rufous-throated Partridge, White-browed Shortwing, and maybe even Eurasian Woodcock. Feeding flocks up here may contain the pixie-like Yellow-bellied Fairy-Fantail and Yellow-browed Tit.

As the morning passes, we steadily move downslope with several stops along the way through excellent forest trails. The possibilities seem almost endless here, as feeding flocks can be exciting and diverse: Gould's Sunbird, Small Niltava, Gray-throated Babbler, Chestnut-vented Nuthatch, White-throated Fantail, Verditer Flycatcher, and many more.

We finish in the afternoon at a conservation site for Blossom-headed Parakeet. As we watch these lovely birds come in to roost, we learn about the conservation efforts underway to protect them.
Accommodations at Inthanon Highland Resort (B,L,D)

Thurs., Mar. 7 Doi Inthanon | Flight to Bangkok

We make one final exploration of Doi Inthanon National Park, focusing on the low-elevation dry dipterocarp forest in search of a few special birds: Collared Falconet and Black-backed Forktail. We return to collect our luggage at the Doi Inthanon Highland Resort and drive back to Chiang Mai International Airport for our short flight to Bangkok.

Accommodations in Bangkok (B,L,D)

Fri., Mar. 8 Pake Thale

We have an early morning start today in order to make the two hour drive to Pak Thale, an expansive area of saltpans, shrimp ponds, and coastal mudflats. Flat and open, we may be able to see local salt farmers harvesting salt that has been neatly lined up in big white piles. This area hosts perhaps one of the greatest concentrations of shorebirds in the world, including up to about thirty different species all told. We make a special effort to see the charismatic and critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper, as well as the endangered Nordmann's Greenshank, Chinese Egret, and Malaysian Plover.

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After a nice midday break, we visit the King's Project and surrounding area — a combination of scorched thorn-scrub and lush mangrove vegetation-types. Green Bee-eater, Golden-bellied Gerygone, White-shouldered Starling, and Plain-backed Sparrow are some of the typical species of these habitats. As the sun sets over the King's Project, we watch thousands of Lyle's Flying Foxes emerge from their roosts and perhaps even an Indian Nightjar.

Our hotel is a small chic hotel, with colorful rooms in a good location.

Accommodations at Sun Hotel Phetchaburi (B,L,D)

Sat., Mar. 9 Pak Thale & Nong Pla Lai

We spend the morning at Pak Thale again, where we have extra time to catch up with any waterbirds that we may have missed and perhaps a few photo opportunities of the salt fields. In the afternoon, we shift our attention inland to the vast rice fields of Petchaburi, well known for their high concentration of wetland birds and wintering raptors. Trees and scrub between the paddies offer varying habitats, and it's fun to see the farmers working the fields and the occasional cow, different and somehow more exotic-looking (for a cow) than those we might see in the United States. Colorful Indian Rollers, White-throated Kingfishers, and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters adorn the wires, various herons, egrets, and Asian Openbill Storks patrol the paddies (including both Cinnamon and Yellow Bittern) and all three of southeast Asia's weavers nest right along the roadsides in conspicuous colonies. It could potentially be a big raptor day: Imperial, Steppe, Booted, and Greater Spotted Eagle are some of the exciting possibilities.

Accommodations at Sun Hotel Petchaburi (B,L,D)

Sun., Mar. 10 Khao Luk Chang & Kaeng Krachan

We head off in the early morning to Khao Luk Chang, a low-elevation site with semi-deciduous forest. We search today for the Black-headed Woodpecker, arguably one of the most beautiful woodpeckers in the world. The habitat is quite open with rather low trees, providing excellent opportunities to see many other species very well, such as Lineated Barbet and Spotted Owlet.

After lunch at our accommodations (and check-in), we visit nearby Kaeng Krachan National Park. We focus on the higher altitude forest first, where roadside birding is often excellent, in search of the near-endemic Ratchet-tailed Treepie. These very unique corvids often mingle in feeding flocks containing Black-throated Laughingthrush and Collared Babbler. There is a good chance for mammals on our way back to Ban Maka, including both Asian Elephant and maybe even Leopard.

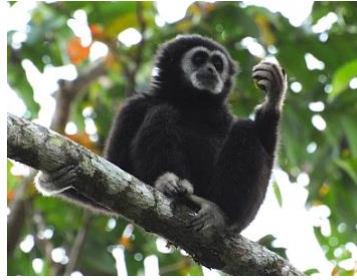
Our hotel is a favorite of the trip, adjacent to the national park on three acres of gardens and forest.

Accommodations at Ban Maka Nature Lodge (B,L,D)

Mon., Mar. 11 Kaeng Krachan National Park

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Kaeng Krachan National Park is the largest national park in Thailand, forming part of a much larger forest complex that provides refuge for many of Asia's rarest mammals and 420 species of birds. Indeed, this national park is of international conservation importance due to the vastness and excellent condition of its tropical evergreen forest. On our first full morning of birding in here, we focus on the lower elevation forest. Highlights along this stretch are many, including many of Asia's most spectacular birds: Great and Rusty-cheeked Hornbill, Blue-bearded and Red-bearded Bee-eater, Heart-spotted and Great Slaty Woodpecker, Black-and-yellow and Black-and-red Broadbill, and so much more. In the dense tangles of wetter vegetation, we may even spot a living jewel — Blue Pitta.

In the afternoon, we venture further up in elevation where mixed feeding flocks can be spectacular. Silver-breasted and Long-tailed Broadbill, Blue-throated and Great Barbet, Bamboo Woodpecker, and White-browed Scimitar-Babbler are all possible. We hope to catch up with some mammals as well, including very good chances of seeing the White-handed Gibbon.

Accommodations at Baan Maka Nature Lodge (B,L,D)

Tues., Mar. 12 Kaeng Krachan National Park

We visit Kaeng Krachan National Park again in the morning for further exploration, perhaps running into a Kalij Pheasant or Gray Peacock-Pheasant along the road on our excursion. At lunch time, we go back to our accommodations. For those who want to continue birding, there are some excellent nearby hides with small water features. These quiet areas attract an amazing assortment of beautiful forest birds — Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush, Common Green-Magpie, Siberian Blue Robin, Black-naped Monarch, and Scaly-breasted Partridge are just some of the possibilities. Every afternoon brings in a slightly different selection of species.

Accommodations at Ban Maka Nature Lodge (B,L,D)

Wed., Mar. 13 Kaeng Krachan National Park to Bangkok

We have one final morning at Kaeng Krachan National Park. Due to the high diversity of species (many of which are uncommon), there is so much potential to continually see new things on every new visit. In the afternoon, we head back to Bangkok via the Nong Pla Lai rice paddies where we may be able to find raptors and waterbirds we may have missed on our first visit.

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Tonight we enjoy one final dinner in Bangkok to celebrate the end of the trip and reminisce about all the great birds and experiences collected along the way on this tour.

Our hotel is lovely, and convenient to the airport.

Accommodations in Bangkok at Mariya Boutique Residence (B,L,D)

Thurs., Mar. 14 Departures

Departures today are at your leisure. (B)

Cost of the Journeys

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Please note, starting in January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$4590 DBL / \$4990 SGL per person, based on double occupancy, from Chiang Mai, departing Bangkok. Cost includes 15 nights' accommodations; all meals as stated in the itinerary; group airport transfers; ground transportation; professional guide services; park, preserve, and other activity fees; and miscellaneous program expenses.

Tour price does not include: roundtrip airfare to Chiang Mai or from Bangkok, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, portage, telephone charges, or alcoholic beverages.

Please note that the cost of the journey is based on a minimum of 6 participants, with a limit of 12 persons. With 8 or more participants, Peg Abbott will join. With fewer than 6 participants, a small group surcharge (typically \$100 – \$300 per person) may apply, or we may request that you pick up the cost of a few additional dinners in lieu of this surcharge.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at Chiang Mai International Airport (CNX) in time for a welcome dinner on February 27. Please book departure flights at your leisure on March 14 from Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok (BKK).

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