

Thailand Birding & Nature

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



Feb. 14 – Mar. 4, 2021

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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 Naturalist Journeys adventure lets you explore this friendly country with experts: visit salt farms and mudflats teeming with thousands of migratory shorebirds, misty montane forests alive with flocks of colorful species, 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, many of which we can 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 contains the southernmost foothills of the Himalayan region. The other province we visit 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 forested areas in the region.

Imagine a Great Hornbill, the size of a swan, glide overhead; a Blue Pitta, intricately patterned, appear like a jewel from a thicket; or a Black-and-yellow Broadbill, painted in pink, yellow, white and black, sitting motionless on a branch. These are some of the experiences we hope for at Kaeng Krachan. There is also a good chance for a few mammals: White-handed Gibbon, Lesser Mouse Deer and Dusky Langur with a chance, even, for the iconic Asian Elephant or Asiatic Leopard.

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-tailed Minla, Clicking Shrike Babbler, Yellow-cheeked Tit, Large Niltava, and Green-tailed Sunbird
- ✓ Experience the atmosphere of the Thai-Myanmar border with its hilltribe communities, scenic views, and abundance of birds
- ✓ Seek out the jewel-like Blue Pitta in the undergrowth at Kaeng Krachan, from a group of 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

NEW! Expanded experience with additional 3 days added to 2021 tour. ***Limited to just 6 clients! *** *With a pre-tour night and two additional birding days added to this year's tour.*

19-Day / 18-Night Thailand Birding & Nature Tour
\$4990, from Chiang Mai

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



Itinerary

Sun., Feb. 14 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 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 (D)

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.

Mon., Feb. 15 Mueng Sam Ma Lotus Swamp & Doi Lang West

After a delicious early morning breakfast (6am) at the Amora Hotel, we drive a short distance to Mueng Sam Ma lotus swamp, a small area of wetlands and overgrown pools on the outskirts of Chiang Mai with views of the surrounding mountains. This area gives us a great introduction to the birds of Thailand with a lot of open country and wetland species in a short space of time. Asian Openbills feeding in the shallows and flocks of Lesser Whistling Ducks will welcome us as we arrive, and we can spot Gray-headed Swamphen and Pheasant-tailed Jacana creeping among the lotus flowers along with Great Egret, Purple Heron, Gray Heron and Yellow Bittern. A couple of specialties of this site are also some of the more cryptic; Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler and Eurasian Wryneck. More colorful are Common Iora, White-throated Kingfisher, and the tiny little Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker. This will be a really good start to our tour.



After a few hours, we drive to the town of Fang for lunch before 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.

Our hotel consists of a collection of cabins among orchard trees run by a local family on the bank of the Kok river. This is a nice base for the next few days with excellent local food.

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

Tues., Feb. 16 Doi Lang East

After breakfast at our accommodation, we continue our exploration of this wild area in search of specialties that are easier to see here than elsewhere in Thailand. Birding around the entry gate for the first hour of the day introduces us to some of the birds of the mountain before we board some local transport for a rather bumpy ride to the higher elevations. The journey is certainly worth it with species that include the amazing Scarlet-faced Liocichla, Whiskered Yuhina, gangs of noisy Dark-backed Sibilas, Himalayan Bluetail, Large Niltava, colorful Black-eared Shrike-Babbler, and Silver-eared Laughingthrush all waiting for us.

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)

Wed., Feb. 17 Fang Hot Springs | Chiang Saen

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. 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. This is a good spot for finding Asian Barred Owlet, flocks of colorful Long-tailed Minivets, the splendid White-faced Jay, Blue Rock-Thrush, and many other species. After birding, we can enjoy a mid-morning iced coffee and admire the lovely scenery of this site.

By mid-morning, we will leave Fang and make a journey of around 2 hours to the small town of Chiang Saen where we have lunch on the banks of the Mekong River. After checking into our comfortable hotel, we can spend the afternoon checking out a variety of wetland areas to look for local specialties such as Small Pratincole, River Lapwing, Indian Spot-billed Duck, Burmese Shrike, and much more besides. The real ornithological highlight here is the harrier roost. From a wetland overlook, we will witness large numbers of harriers coming in to roost. At first they come in one by one, but by the time the light is failing, there can be hundreds of Pied Harriers and Eastern Marsh Harriers wheeling around before they plunge into the wet vegetation to roost. Our hotel is just a short drive away where we will have dinner.

Accommodation at Siam Triangle Hotel (B,L,D)

Thurs., Feb. 18 Chiang Saen

Breakfast at our hotel is eaten overlooking sunrise on the Mekong River, one of the world's great rivers. Nearby, we will visit wetland areas set among farmland for a wide variety of species. Early morning at the waterside often reveals skulkers like Lanceolated Warbler or Bluethroat while migratory ducks can include Ferruginous Duck, Garganey, and Northern Pintail. The damp edges of these wetlands usually provide feeding areas for Citrine Wagtail and White Wagtail, as well as small numbers of Gray-headed Lapwing.

Chiang Saen is a historic town with some ancient temples, and we will have time to make a visit to the most important of these; the impressive Wat Chedi Luang. We can also enjoy another lunch of local food while taking in the view across the river to Laos.

In the afternoon we can check different areas, depending on the most up to date local knowledge, for key species such as Gray-throated Martin or the increasingly rare Jerdon's Bushchat.

Accommodation at Siam Triangle Hotel (B,L,D)



Fri., Feb. 19 Doi Tung | Fang

An early start with a packed breakfast will put us at Mae Fa Luang Arboretum at a very good time of day. This picturesque location was established by the King's grandmother on the Thai-Myanmar border and is a beautiful location. Over the last few years this cool and scenic spot has turned up some really excellent sightings of birds coming to feeding stations with species such as White-tailed Robin, Black-breasted Thrush and even rarer migratory thrushes such as Chestnut Thrush and Gray-winged Blackbird. The most recent local knowledge will be key here but birding around this mountain is always a lovely experience with birds including Gray-backed Shrike, Great Barbet, and Blyth's Shrike-babbler to entertain us.

After a morning of birding here we will descend and have lunch in a nearby restaurant and begin our journey back to the town of Fang. After checking in to our hotel we can either take some time to relax or those who are keen can continue birding on nearby rice fields for more views of the spectacular Pied Harrier.

Accommodations at Tangerine Ville Hotel, Fang (B,L,D)

Sat., Feb. 20 Doi Ang Kang

From our hotel, we ascend a steep road to spend time on Doi Ang Kang, one of Thailand's most scenic regions. Here hilltribe villages are set among farmland, forest and spectacular jagged mountains with a variety of birds that are scarce in many parts of the country. In the early morning, bird activity can be really good where the sun first hits the forest. The colorful Silver-eared Mesia is one of the main attractions here along with smart Crested Finchbill, Brown-breasted Bulbul and quite frequently good views of Giant Nuthatch. Visiting the King's Project, colorful Mrs Gould's Sunbirds are often seen feeding on flowering trees as well as Japanese Tit, Yellow-cheeked Tit, and Chestnut-flanked White-eye.

We can enjoy some really good local food at lunch and try some of the dried fruit that is produced here before moving on to look for Daurian Redstart, Yellow-streaked Warbler, and checking out the products in a hilltribe market.

Accommodations at Tangerine Ville Hotel, Fang (B,L,D)

Sun., Feb. 21 Doi Lang West

On our visit to Doi Lang West, we drive up 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 Rufous-backed Sibia, Golden Babbler, Stripe-breasted Woodpecker, Maroon Oriole, Blue-winged Minla, as well as the much-desired Himalayan Cutia.

Accommodations at Tangerine Ville Hotel, Fang (B,L,D)

Mon., Feb. 22 Doi Lang West | Doi Ang Kang – Inthanon Highland Resort

What we do this morning really depends on what we have seen over the previous days and where the birding has been best. We can revisit either Doi Lang West, if we need another attempt to see Mrs Hume's Pheasant, or we can revisit the beautiful scenic areas of Doi Ang Kang. It is nice to have a bit of flexibility so that we enjoy the best of what the area has to offer.

By late morning, we will begin our journey towards Doi Inthanon. This is our longest drive of the trip, and we will leave in plenty of time so that we can make some rest stops along the way and arrive at our accommodation in good time. The gardens of Inthanon Highland Resort are lovely, and we should have time to do some birding around here or just take a break if so desired. Finding Spotted Owlet and Brown Boobook is usually fairly easy, and both species are active before it gets properly dark.

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

Tues., Feb. 23 Doi Inthanon

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.



In the late afternoon we can visit the dry woodland in the foothills to see the cute little Collared Falconet as well as Black-headed Woodpeckers.

Our hotel is surrounded by nature in a beautiful location.
Accommodations at Inthanon Highland Resort (B,L,D)

Wed., Feb. 24 Doi Inthanon

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 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., Feb. 25 Doi Inthanon | Bangkok

We make one final visit to Doi Inthanon National Park. We usually visit a blind which overlooks a small stream. Here we hope for fine views of Slaty-backed Forktail, White-crowned Forktail, and Dark-sided Thrush. There are usually a few surprises here too, perhaps we can spot a Lesser Shortwing emerge from the undergrowth! After a



short morning here, we drive back to the airport in Chiang Mai and take a short flight to Bangkok. Here we have some time to relax and catch up with emails, photo processing, or just read a book before dinner.

Accommodations at Amari Don Muang Hotel (B,L,D)

Fri., Feb. 26 Pak Thale | Laem Pak Bia

We have an early morning start today in order to make the two-hour drive to Pak Thale, an expansive area of salt pans, 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 Far Eastern Curlew.

After a nice local lunch, we take a boat trip out along the river and out to a sand bar on the estuary. This is always an enjoyable trip and with birds that include Malaysian Plover, Pacific Reef Egret, Great Crested Tern, and White-faced Plover – a great little birding excursion.

Our hotel is a small chic hotel in the nearby town of Petchaburi.

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

Sat., Feb. 27 Petchaburi Rice Fields

Extensive areas of rice fields and fishponds are close to our hotel, which are excellent bird habitats. In the early morning, there can be a lot of activity with Black-browed Reed Warbler, Oriental Reed Warbler and Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers calling from the reeds. Flights of Oriental Darter overhead and colorful birds such as Pink-necked Green Pigeon and Stork-billed Kingfisher are exciting. Freckle-breasted Woodpecker, White-browed Crake, cute Cotton Pygmy Goose and Ruddy-breasted Crake are all target species here. Expect to see a lot of birds in just a few hours!

Fishponds usually contain Black-headed Ibis and Painted Stork, while the chance of a rarity is always there too. If we find a pond that has been drained, exposing dead fish, we might see some impressive congregations of scavenging Black Kite.

In the heat of the day, we can rest in our hotel before making another late afternoon visit to look for species that are a little more elusive such as Watercock, Greater Spotted Eagle, and Cinnamon Bittern.

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



Sun., Feb. 28 Kaeng Krachan National Park

After breakfast at our accommodation, we drive to Kaeng Krachan National Park for our first experience of tropical forest birding. 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.

After lunch at our accommodations (and check-in), we can visit one of the nearby waterholes where a variety of birds come to bathe and drink. Depending on our luck, we can often see some really special birds here, perhaps a Gray Peacock-Pheasant or even Blue Pitta. We know all the locals who maintain these water features so we will know which key species are regularly visiting which location.

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., March 1 Kaeng Krachan National Park

In the morning, we make another visit into Kaeng Krachan, building on our sightings from the previous day. The forest here is rich but many of the most exciting birds are thinly spread so we have extra days. Thus, we have plenty of time to search for some really memorable birds and hopefully some mammals along the way. Timing things correctly should give us Black-thighed Falconet and spectacular Black-and-red Broadbill, while noisy Sultan Tit, a variety of barbets and woodpeckers should turn up before we go in search of Orange-breasted Trogon and Silver-breasted Broadbill.

Lunch at our accommodation usually provides some nice bird sightings, too.

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 a very good chance of seeing the White-handed Gibbon.

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



Tues., March 2 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 in the early hours. 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., March 3 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.

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 conveniently located near the airport.
Accommodations in Bangkok at Mariya Boutique Residence (B,L,D)

Thurs., March 4 Departures

Departures today are at your leisure. (B)

Guide Nick Upton



Nick has been pursuing birds since the age of six after being shown a Dartford Warbler by his father on a family holiday. After traveling and birding in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, Nick settled in Thailand over twenty years ago and now has over a decade of experience in leading bird tours throughout Asia. Widely recognized as the leading guide for Thailand, he can find difficult species and interpret the ecology of the bird, as well as the conservative issues many species face.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at Chiang Mai International Airport (CNX) in time for a welcome dinner on February 14; Please book departure flights at your leisure on March 4 from Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok (BKK). Please contact our travel agent, Pam Davis of Willamette Travel for help booking flights: pamd@wittravel.com or 800-821-0401.



Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is **\$4990 DBL / \$5490 SGL** per person, based on double occupancy, from Chiang Mai.

Cost includes 18 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.

Photo Credits

Asian Elephant, Carlos Sanchez (CS); Gray Wagtail, CS; Chestnut-tailed Minla, CS; Blue Pitta, CS; Northern Treeshrew, CS; Common Green-Magpie, CS; Long-tailed Shrike, CS; Oriental Pied-Hornbill, CS; Hill Blue Flycatcher, CS; Puff-throated Babbler, CS; Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, CS; Group birding, Peg Abbott (PA); Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler, CS; Water Lily, CS; Siberian Rubythroat, CS; White-bellied Redstart, CS; Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, CS; Birding, PA; Waterfall, PA; Black-naped Monarch, CS; Hill Prinia, CS; Radde's Warbler, CS; Ferruginous Partridge, CS; Crimson Sunbird, CS; Black-collared Starling, CS; Gould's Sunbird, Davison's Leaf Warbler, CS; Great Myna, CS; Little Egret, CS; Golden-bellied Gerygone, CS; Eurasian Tree Sparrow, CS; Chestnut-tailed Minla, CS; Slaty-backed Forktail, CS; Spot-breasted Parrotbill, CS; Scarlet-faced Liocichla, CS; Rufous-bellied Swallow, CS; Stork-billed Kingfisher, CS; Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush, CS.

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