

12 Days/11 Nights

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Avanti Journeys - Past & Present of Japan & Thailand: Tokyo, Kyoto, Bangkok, & Chiang Mai

Time travel into the past to learn the history and ancient customs of these two venerable countries with their countless shrines, revered Buddhist culture, and honored traditions. Conversely, you'll encounter today's Japan; the land of high-tech, bullet trains and Michelin starred restaurants. Then experience the bustling and high-energy of Bangkok, while Chiang Mai presents an alluring alternative; blissfully calm amid beautiful temples and misty mountains.

ACCOMMODATIONS

• 3 Nights Tokyo

• 3 Nights Bangkok

- 3 Nights Kyoto

- 2 Nights Chiang Mai

INCLUSIONS

- Private Arrival & Departure Transfers per City
- Private Future is Tokyo via Public Transportation
- Private Pop Culture Afternoon Tour via Public Transportation
- Private Classic Kyoto Tour via Public Transportation
- Private Kyoto Home Visit with Tea Ceremony with Kimono Wearing Experience via Taxi

- Private Bangkok Tour by Train, Boat, Foot, & Tuk Tuk
- Private Old Chiang Mai City Walking Tour
- Private Royal Park Rajapurek & Wat Doi Khom Temple Tour
- Siam Niramit Show with Private Transfers
- Roundtrip Green-Class Rail between Tokyo & Kyoto plus Seat Reservations

- Air LAX to Tokyo, Tokyo to Bangkok, Bangkok to Chiang Mai, Chiang Mai to Bangkok, Bangkok to LAX*
- Daily Breakfast



ARRIVAL:

Arriving at Haneda or Narita Airport, meet your English-speaking driver for your private transfer to your hotel. The remainder of the day is at your leisure for relaxation or exploring. Dinner will be on your own this evening.

Greetings are important in Japan, where the culture is defined by politeness and formality. Although English is increasingly spoken at restaurants in Tokyo, it is still far from common. A simple konnichi-wa (good day) or konban-wa (good evening) will help put your hosts at ease. A few basic phrases go a long way, so practice saying excuse me (sumimasen), please (kudasai), and thank you (arigato gozaimasu).

(Accommodations, Tokyo)



TOKYO:

After breakfast, meet your guide for a full-day tour featuring Tokyo's approach to science, technology and environmental issues. We'll travel via public transportation*; another aspect of Tokyo's advanced transit planning. We'll start at Odaiba, a large man-made island in Tokyo Bay. It originated as a set of small man-made fort islands (daiba literally means "fort"), to protect the city from possible attacks by sea. Among the exhibition pavilions are indoor shopping malls, game centers, cafes, restaurants, and surrealistic constructions that seem to hail from the future rather than the past. One of the more interesting attractions is the Museum of Emerging Science, a highly interactive and bilingual science museum displaying exhibits about environmental issues, robots, information technology, biology and

space exploration. For car buffs, the Mega Web is a giant Toyota showroom that shows off all of their latest models, car accessories and technologies. The Panasonic Center is a showroom for the latest products and technologies including their latest cameras, TVs, computers, and video games.

We'll return to the mainland on Tokyo's famed monorail and visit **Akihabara**, Tokyo's Electric Town. *Akihabara* is famous for its hundreds of electronic shops, selling a mind boggling range of gadgets, gizmos, and devices that one way or another plug into the world of electricity as we know it. However in recent times, *Akihabara* has become even more famous for its *Otaku* culture. These are young Japanese who are obsessed with cosplay, manga, anime, gaming or other aspects of Japanese culture. Before departing, take a ride on the Palette Town Ferris wheel and marvel at Tokyo's cityscape. Returning via the subway to your hotel, dinner will be on your own this evening.

****Using public transit in Tokyo is very easy for the English speaking traveler. Most subway stations have signs using the Latin alphabet (i.e. Shibuya, Omote-sando, Roppongi, Ginza, etc). The lines are color coded just like other subways so it's very easy to get around. If you are taking a taxi, your hotel can provide a card with their address in Japanese.***

(Breakfast & Accommodations, Tokyo)



TOKYO:

Today, we'll take in a few of Tokyo's centers of pop culture with our private guide. Our first stop is in Shibuya, Tokyo's main center for youth fashion and culture, whose streets are the birthplace to many of Japan's fashion and entertainment trends. It is also home to the famous 5-way scramble (Shibuya) crossing, rumored to be the busiest intersection in the world. At peak times, there can be up to 1000 people crossing, all managing to avoid collisions with amazing agility. We'll move on to **Harajuku**, the center of Japan's most extreme teenage cultures and fashion styles, but also offers shopping for adults and some historic sights. The focal point of *Harajuku's* teenage culture is *Takeshita Dori* and its side streets, which are lined by many trendy shops, fashion boutiques. A few blocks south is **Omotesando**, a broad, tree lined avenue sometimes referred to as Tokyo's *Champs-Elysees*, catering to a more adult clientele. Take a break from the shopping as not far away is Meiji Jingu, one of Tokyo's major shrines and located in a large green oasis shared with the spacious *Yoyogi Park*.

We'll end the afternoon with a cup of coffee or tea in one of Tokyo's famous **maid cafes** where the waitresses dress up and act like maids. You will also have the opportunity to take a souvenir photo with one of the maids. We will return to your hotel via public transportation.

(Breakfast & Accommodations, Tokyo)

TOKYO TO KYOTO:



After breakfast, you'll have a private transfer via taxi to the rail station and take the *Nozomi Bullet Train* to Japan's spiritual capital of Kyoto. After checking into your hotel, the remainder of the day is at your leisure.

(Breakfast, Tokyo; Accommodations, Kyoto)



KYOTO:

Today, a private "Classic Kyoto" full-day tour awaits you. We will travel by subway and bus and start at Ryoanji Zen Temple, the site of Japan's most famous rock garden, which attracts hundreds of visitors every day. Originally an aristocrat's villa during the Heian Period, the site was converted into a Zen temple in 1450. The garden consists of a rectangular plot of pebbles surrounded by low earthen walls, with 15 rocks laid out in small groups on patches of moss. An interesting feature of the garden's design is that from any vantage point at least one of the rocks is always hidden from the viewer.

Keeping with the "classic" theme, our next stop is the Kyoto Imperial Palace, the former residence of Japan's Imperial Family until 1868, when the emperor and capital were moved from Kyoto to Tokyo. It's located in the spacious Kyoto Imperial Garden, an attractive oasis-like setting in the center of the city that also encompasses the Sento Imperial Palace. Before resuming our tour in the afternoon, there will be time for lunch, as there's a variety of restaurants surrounding the garden perimeter.

Now you're ready to take a stroll along the ***Philosopher's Path***, a pleasant stone path through the northern part of Kyoto's *Higashiyama* district. The path follows a canal which is lined by hundreds of cherry trees. Approximately two kilometers long, the path begins around ***Ginkakuji*** (Silver Pavilion) and ends in the neighborhood of *Nanzenji*. The path gets its name due to Nishida Kitaro, one of Japan's most famous philosophers, who was said to practice meditation while walking this route on his daily commute to Kyoto University. Don't leave without visiting the ***Nanzen-ji Temple***, a sprawling Zen paradise surrounded by lush green hills. If you look close, you'll discover a secret waterfall grotto about 200 meters up in the hills behind the temple containing several Buddhist images. Return to your hotel via the subway or bus and dinner will be on your own this evening.

Note: Like Tokyo, Kyoto's subway stations have signs posted in Japanese, and Latin alphabet that indicate the next station on the route. Stops are announced in Japanese and English on the train. Their buses also have destinations posted in both Japanese and English, as well as announcing points of interest in English. The new Raku Buses (100 & 101) painted in distinct designs operate on the most popular tourists routes.

(Breakfast & Accommodations, Kyoto)



KYOTO:

In the morning, you'll have a unique experience of a private Kyoto Home Visit, which will include a Tea Ceremony complete with wearing a kimono. Your guide will meet at your hotel and escort you via taxi to the home of an instructor of one of Japan's traditional arts. Upon arriving, you'll don a beautiful kimono and learn about the various types of tea and the instruments used to prepare it with the support/advice from the professional instructor and interpretation from our assistant. You will see how every movement has a meaning and what serving tea to guests means in Japan as well about the different kinds of kimono, and which kimono should be worn on each different occasion. After this captivating presentation, you'll return by taxi, and the remainder of the day is free for independent sightseeing.

(Breakfast & Accommodations, Kyoto)



KYOTO TO BANGKOK:

A full day of travel, as you take your private transfer to the rail station and board the *Nozomi Bullet Train* to Tokyo. You'll connect with the NEX Train to Narita Airport for your flight to Bangkok. After clearing customs at Bangkok Airport, meet your driver for a private transfer to your hotel.

****For many travelers, Bangkok is the first stop on travels in Thailand and throughout Southeast Asia. The wai (why), or pressing your palms together at chest or nose level and bowing your head slightly, is a gesture that you will encounter almost immediately upon arrival in Thailand.***

(Breakfast, Kyoto; Accommodations, Bangkok)



BANGKOK:

Today we'll enjoy a full-day tour of this fascinating city and travel like a local as we use all modes of transportation; train, boat, by foot, and tuk-tuk*. The City Safari will take you through some of Bangkok's most exciting areas. Start by taking the Skytrain from your hotel to Saphan Taksin pier, and hop on an express boat and cruise along the Chao Phraya river to Tha Chang pier. You'll visit Wat Po and the famous Reclining Buddha, covered in gold leaf. And since we had an early start, we can experience the monks morning chanting ritual. You will continue by tuk-tuk to *Baan Bat*, where locals have been crafting monks alms bowls since the 1700's, and then to **Wat Saket**, the 'Golden Mount'. Climb its nearly 400 low steps to the top and see the large golden *Chedi*, which houses a holy relic of the Buddha.

Enjoy panoramic views of the city from this high vantage point. Exploring on foot, we'll head to the Giant Swing, a religious structure, formerly used in old Brahmin ceremonies. Afterwards we'll take time to enjoy lunch at a local restaurant serving up some of the best Thai dishes in town. Save room to try an original Thai dessert.

We continue to Phanfa Lilat pier and take boat ride through the *Saen Saep* canal to the beautiful Lanna-style house of Jim Thompson, the man who brought Thai silk international recognition before mysteriously disappearing during a trip to Malaysia. You'll return to your hotel via Skytrain, and dinner will be on your own this evening.

***tuk-tuk: a mechanized three-wheeled taxi that can transport one through the city's many exotic and thrilling delights!**

(Breakfast & Accommodations, Bangkok)



BANGKOK TO CHIANG MAI:

Take your private transfer to the airport for a short 80-minute flight to mystical Chiang Mai. Your guide will meet you upon arrival for the transfer to your hotel. The remainder of the day is at your leisure, and dinner will be on your own this evening.

(Breakfast, Bangkok; Accommodations, Chiang Mai)



CHIANG MAI:

After breakfast, put on your walking shoes, as your guide will lead you on a private tour of this charismatic South East Asian city by foot! What better place to start our day of discovery than the banks of the Mae Ping River. From here, we join the bustle of **Waroros Market**, a favorite for Chiang Mai locals for exotic species, colorful fruits, an endless variety of rice and bizarre new culinary delights. Then we continue by rickshaw to **Tapae Gate**, which is Chiang Mai's main entrance to the old walled city. In days gone by, it was the gate through which traders, diplomats, and visiting monks passed when they had business in the city proper. From here, we continue our walk to Three Kings Monument and the city's most beautiful temples; **Wat Chedi Luang**, where the famous Emerald Buddha was once enshrined, and **Wat Phra Singh**, home to a very old and sacred Buddha image.

Afterwards we'll return to your hotel. You'll have time for lunch, and then in the afternoon, your guide will meet you for a tour of the Royal Park Rajapurek and Wat Doi Khom. The Royal Park was previously named as International Exposition for His Majesty the King; Royal Flora Rajapruek. This sprawling formal garden has 21 themed gardens donated by international governments as part of the Horticultural Exposition in 2006. The gardens represent other countries, and are divided into areas of orchids, butterflies, cacti, etc, until you reach the royal palace.

We'll continue to the **Wat Prathat Doi Khom**, built in the period of Queen Jammathewee of Lumphun by both of her sons. The oldest structure of the Wat Phra That Doi Kham temple is the chedi (pagoda), that was constructed in the year 687. Not far away from the chedi is the temple's most noticeable feature, an enormous sitting Buddha image. Standing 17 meters high on top of the hill top, it dominates the area and is visible from miles away. You'll find that the temple's

setting on top of a hill contributes to the serene and peaceful atmosphere. Returning to your hotel in a relaxed state of mind, you will have dinner on your own this evening and reminisce on today's touring.

(Breakfast & Accommodations, Chiang Mai)



CHIANG MAI TO BANGKOK:

Meet your guide for your airport transfer and your short flight back to Bangkok. Your driver will meet you for the private transfer to your hotel. Remainder of the day is free, however in the evening, you will be guests at the renowned **Siam Niramit Show**. It's a world-class performance of Thailand's arts and cultural heritage, spanning seven centuries and brilliantly captured in a spectacular production. This colorful spectacle is performed on the gigantic stage, featuring over 150 performers with as many as 500 costumes, including special effects as well as real elephants. The *Siam Niramit Show* takes you on a journey through the myths, festivals and the history of Siam and Thailand, and will leave you with fond memories on your last evening.

(Breakfast, Chiang Mai; Accommodations, Bangkok)



DEPARTURE:

After breakfast, your driver takes you to the airport for your flight back to Los Angeles (or other selected city).

****Flights from other U.S. departure cities also available.***

(Breakfast, Bangkok)
