

Looking for new adventure in your life? Want to broaden your horizons past Daytona or Padre Island? How about Thailand, "land of smiles?" You'll find hundreds of miles of warm beaches, tangy ethnic flavors, friendly people and a tropical climate. All this on \$15 a day.

Most travelers include Thailand as a stop on their around-the-world tour, but if your time constraints are more in tune with the rest of the real world, two to three weeks would do to "do" Thailand.

Unless you come in overland from Malaysia or another Southeast Asian country, Bangkok will be your first view into this wonderfully exotic nation. Don't let it be your last impression. Bangkok is big, dusty, bustling, crowded and hot. It also is fun, the center of Thai culture, government and education, a shopper's paradise and a good place to get your bearings. The Royal Hotel, at \$39 a night, offers an oasis of calm in a sometimes overwhelming city. But after a couple of days, having done your share of temple gazing, canal cruising and palace touring, it's time to move on. There really is so much more to see in Thailand.

A ride on the overnight train to Chiang Mai, the former capital of the northern kingdoms, is the best way to see the landscape and meet the Thais. For far less than what you pay on European trains, you can enjoy the views of water buffalo plodding through rice paddies, colorfully dressed children walking along quiet dirt roads and lush hills in the distance. In the morning you awake to the sights and sounds of Thailand's second city. Chiang Mai is an excellent jumping off point for visiting the "hill tribes" of the north. Or take a day trip to an elephant training camp and try your skills at elephant driving. For \$10 a night you can find a nice double room at one of the scores of guest houses, many, like Top North, with pool included.

Chiang Mai is a good place to relax and melt into the local pace as well. At \$1-\$2 a meal, you can sample many of Thailand's exotic flavors. This city of 100,000 is more manageable than Bangkok. And its rich history and proximity to the hill tribes make it culturally "awesome."

For the beach bum in all of us, Thailand offers the run of the gamut, from plush ocean resorts to nearly deserted isles with beachside bungalows that wouldn't shock anyone's wallet. With the world-famous Phuket, low-key Koh Samui and hundreds of others to choose from, you can pick your pleasure. Sailboarding, hang gliding, snorkeling, diving or just hanging out under a lofty palm, you'll find it all in Thailand.

But besides the temples, the food, the bigger-than-life Buddhas, the shopping, there are the people. Their culture is rich, and they are proud of their heritage. They love fun — *sanuck* means fun in Thai. And everything must be *sanuck* or it isn't worth doing. No wonder Thailand is called the "land of smiles." Visit and you'll never wonder why again ☺

## Land of Smiles



**THAILAND GIVES YOU  
PARADISE WITH A TWIST**

*By Patrick Donovan*

Besides stunning sights like Bangkok's Wat Phra Keo temple and Grand Palace, Thailand offers its people — full of smiles and proud of their rich heritage.