

Chiang Mai History

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Chiang Mai has one of the richest historical stories in all of Thailand.

Posted by Mr. Michael Comglas on 04 July 2006
British Nationality

Hundreds of years before the ascension of the Ayutthaya and Sukhotai kingdoms, the northern Thai kingdom of Lanna was a prosperous and flourishing state that was founded on the friendship of three kings. Being able to chronicle its beginnings back 700 years, Chiang Mai has one of the richest historical stories in all of Thailand.

King Mengrai is the founding father of "Nophaburi Sri Nakorn Ping Chiang Mai". In 1296, he christened this the capital of his blossoming Lanna kingdom or Kingdom of a thousand rice fields. Originally ruling Chiang Rai, Fang and then Chiang Saen, which used to be one of the most important trading centers within the vicinity of the Mekong, King Mengrai eventually moved southward. What is now known as Lamphun, and historically known as Haripunchai, was overtaken by this powerful northern king. This area is only 50 kilometers south of present day Chiang Mai.

AS mother nature can be a fickle ally, King Mangrai's first attempt at a brand new settlement in the lush ping valley were foiled by a devastating river flood. Mengrai was forced to pack up and search for a new site. History has a way or revealing itself, so now, 700 years later, southeast of [Chiang Mai](#) there lies the magnificent ruins which serve as a reminder of the ambition of one of the areas earliest rulers.

Today the site is named Wiang Khum Khan. It is one of the most visited and most important historical artifacts in the province. No trip is complete without a visit to this grand and ancient site.

The 13th century saw a great transformation take place in Asia. King Mengrai was a vigorous and victorious chief who, from 1259 until 1317, led the Lanna to affluence and prosperity. Together with King Ngam Muang of Phayao province and King Ramkhumhaeng of Sukhothai, the three created a triad of allies who thwarted the Mongol invaders in the early 13th century. Although the Mon were the original dwellers of the banks of the Wang and Ping river valleys, having been settled in the region since the 8th century, the Lanna would emerge the victor in the war for this land. The Lanna assimilated the language, religious beliefs and skills of the Mon culture. As the years have passed, a distinguished cultural group, recognized as the Khon Mueng, has come forth out of the melting pot of Lanna and Mon histories.

The new capital of Lanna “Nophaburi Sri Nakorn Ping Chiang Mai [Thailand](#)”, quickly gained notoriety as the religious and cultural hub of the area and would continue to do so for many hundreds of years. Geographically, the city originally covered one square mile and was the birthplace for some of the most magnificent temples in the country. Wat Chiang Man, which was completed in the early 14th century, still stands proud and tall today. In 1345, Wat Phra Singh followed. Wat Suan Dawk came shortly after with impossibly high chedis and finally, Wat Jed Yod was created especially in 1477 for the 8th World Buddhist Council. In addition to the awe-inspiring works of religious and cultural art, it was around this time that [Chiang Mai](#)'s signature moat and bastions came to be. All of these individual creations are a testament to the strength and prosperity enjoyed by 14th century Lanna Kingdom.

Chiang Mai's distinguished cultural history does not peak there however. The 16th century watched as King Tilokarat bought the great Lanna kingdom, especially Chiang Mai, to its apex. He ruled an area that extended as far south as the Sukhotai province, as wide north as the contemporary Chinese/Myanmar border, and as distant east as the Nan province of today. King Tilokarat was responsible for the construction and completion of the great chedi Luang, which, when finished, stood at a regal and magnificent 96 meters. Until the 1950's this stood as the tallest architectural achievement in the city despite being knocked down to 42 meters as a result of 1545 earthquake.

Chiang Mai finally had a fall from grace between the 16th and 18th centuries. Due to ineffective leadership she found herself involved in a succession of Ayutthayan and Burmese invasions. Although her people fought hard, dominion of the city seemed to be always just out of arms reach. For 200 years the Lanna kingdom persevered, even though at one point things got so desperate the city was almost completely abandoned. Between 1727 and 1763 the kingdom briefly regained control of her capital city only to be foiled by the Burmese one more time.

King Taksin (Rama I) who ruled Bangkok ,or Thonburi, as it was historically known, decided to put a definitive end to the Burmese invasions in 1774. Taksin understood that protecting Lanna was in turn protecting Siam. A Lampang nobleman (Jao Meuang) named Chao Kawila was finally ordered to finish the occupation of the Burmese. This brave general succeeded in defeating his countries attackers once and for all.

In response to this great accomplishment, Chao Kawila was named Chiang Mai's viceroy by a grateful King Taksin. Kawila was just the influence the city needed. Under his watchful eye, Chiang Mai continued to increase in might and force. Kawila oversaw the monumental reconstruction of the brick walls that surround the city to this day. He also developed mutually satisfying trade agreements with China and Burma, as well as constructing a river port which lies at the end of what is presently known as Thapae Road.

A Mr. Ralph Fitch, who traveled from Gao to Pegu during 1583- 1591, is the first foreign visitor to have recorded his experiences. He spoke mainly of a settlement known as 'Jamahey' and most notably remarked that he was 'in a fair and great town'. The next couple of explorers who became a part of [Chiang Mai](#)'s recorded history are Thomas Samuel and Thomas Driver who arrived in 1614. They came with the East Indian Company as representatives and, more likely than not, arrived overland from Burma.

The Burmese were in the secure grasp of the British by the 1850's. The British consulate in Bangkok and the Siamese royal family reached an agreement in the form of the Bowring treaty, which granted British traders situated in Northern Thailand special rights. Basically these traders were allowed to freely farm teak and log it down the Salween River which is located in the Shan state. By the late 1800's the British were consistently putting pressure on the royal Thai government trying to receive additional compensation from the poverty stricken prince of Chiang Mai. This began to cause a strain in the relationship between both Bangkok and Chiang Mai and the government and the people. King Chulalongkorn was finally forced to make a statement in 1869, as some Christian missionaries were beaten to death as a response to the pressure felt from both the British and the government in Bangkok.

With the introduction of technology into the Siam kingdom, Chiang Mai became a much more inclusive part of the Rattanakosin kingdom. The Rattanakosin was the major controlling force of the majority of Thailand and as modern tools and techniques became more prevalent in the country, Chiang Mai was unwittingly pulled into the entire kingdom's politic. The Lanna had managed to hold onto the old ways for this long, but the 1883 introduction of a fully functioning postal service and the 1921 arrival of a modern railway and telegraph service meant a new era was being ushered in. In 1932, the famous bloodless revolution occurred and saw the fall of the absolute monarchy. It was now that Chiang Mai became an official province of the country. A decade and change later, in 1949, the term Thailand became official and the moniker Siam became a thing of the past.

With the change of name, it seemed that it was truly the end of an era. Although Chiang Mai [Thailand](#) had had its fair share of challenges and upheavals, the worst, it seemed was yet to come. World War II brought a Japanese invasion and occupation to the area which saw too many northern Thais drafted and forced to help open up the gritty Asian interior by building roads. Now this was no small feat as the terrain is impossibly impermeable but once again the northern Thais reached their goal through sheer will and determination. Today we can enjoy the fruits of their labor.

The Northern area of Thailand has not always been warm and hospitable for tourists and foreigners however. In the 50's, 60's and 70's, the area experienced a series of military governments overtaking the local leadership. Many [Chiang Mai](#) students took matters into their own hands by staging protests and by 1973 things had come to a head. There was a brutal

encounter between students and the military and the students were forced to go high into the mountains and form communist parties. This in turn produced an unsafe environment for the casual explorer of northern Thailand. The 1980's finally provided welcome relief as the political beliefs in the area slowly began to transform and the students choose peace thus making this beautiful area traveler friendly.

The 1990's were host to a cornucopia of prosperity for the area in the form of tourism. Since northern Thailand modernized this was the single largest economic boom as word began to spread about Chiang Mai's incredible natural beauty, her people's polite, easy-going manner and the cost efficiency. It was only a matter of time before property developers for Bangkok and beyond began to purchase chunks of land at a surprisingly swift rate.

The 1990's also saw Chiang Mai step onto the world's stage. By patriotically celebrating 700 years of history in 1992 and then proudly welcoming the Asian games to her land in 1998, the magnificent city of Chiang Mai ensured her spot in the hearts and memories of travelers from all over. Although 1997 saw the Asian financial crisis, Chiang Mai [Thailand](#) characteristically pulled through making it one of the foremost metropolitan centers in the kingdom becoming home to a large society of ex-patriots and visitors each year. Chiang Mai still maintains its regal Lanna personality and world renowned enchanting individuality making it a definite 'must see' on any tourist's list of things to do. If you want to see the crème de la crème of Thai culture, Chiang Mai is an opportunity not to be missed.

Chiang Mai Hotels

Chiang Mai or "The pearl of the North" as it is often called is the major economical hub in the North of Thailand and the country's second biggest city after Bangkok. It attracts many tourists and can provide travelers with numerous [Chiang Mai hotels](#) and resorts in all price ranges. Chiang Mai is the ideal starting point for excursions into the Northern highlands and the climate is much more accommodating as in central [Thailand](#). It is well known that Chiang Mai hotels are of a very high quality and inside Thailand some of the **best accommodations** can be found here.