



## Elephant rides replaced by a learning experience



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## 48 hours in Langkawi



## Thailand sets up shop to tax tourists

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# Thailand sets up shop to tax tourists

Thailand's tourism policy board revives travel tax proposal prompting one travel executive to ask: "Have they lost their marbles."

Thailand's National Tourism Policy Board says a proposal to tax tourists THB300 when they enter the country will be used to rebuild tourism confidence.

Travel companies disagree. They believe the timing is way off when the tourism industry is on its knees and amid a second Covid-19 surge that has stalled domestic travel; the only remaining source of revenue.

One travel company's CEO emailed TTR Weekly asking: "Have they finally lost their marbles?" Others confided that it was the worst possible time to extract additional cash from the few international tourists who might venture to Thailand. "It plays into the

hands of competitive destinations that will obviously benefit if they can demonstrate empathy with cash-strapped travellers," another tour operator suggested.

To be fair the THB300 travel tax has been stewing on the board's stove for years, six to be exact, and despite it gaining the green light last week there remain serious obstacles to negotiate before final approval. One is the collection process that has left the architects of the proposed tax in a constant muddle.

Would airlines add the travel tax to other fees and taxes included in the airfare? The answer is no unless there was a hefty commission on offer to make it worthwhile. Or would airports have to provide airport counters and queue channels for the thousands of tourists who in normal times jam Thailand's gateway airports?

Local media latched on to the board's announcement noting that it would take effect once the Royal Gazette publishes details of the ruling possibly later this month.

Arguments favouring taxing travellers suggest that a portion of the cash payment (The Bangkok Post claimed THB34) would cover a basic insurance package to cover medical emergencies incurred by tourists. Some of them abscond without settling their hospital bills. The remainder of the tax would support tourism marketing, management and development including the restoration of heritage sites.

Based on the latest Tourism Authority of Thailand forecast for 2021, the country could welcome at the most 10 million visitors up from around 6 million in 2020. The 2019 peak year, pre-

Covid-19, registered just short of 40 million tourists. When you multiply the 2019 total by THB300 you have an enormous war chest for the government to tap, but Covid-19 changed all that. Today the arithmetic is not so compelling. Although THB3,000,000,000 should not be sneezed at, there is the risk that it could be perceived as the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back in the minds of cost-conscious tourists. They would shuffle off to other shores.

It's a pity the board made the decision this month. It might hint of a mercenary mentality at play or a sneaky manoeuvre to get yet another tourism-related tax through the net while the industry is preoccupied. It is grappling with a financial crisis, mass closures of resorts and travel companies and a virtual travel lockdown.

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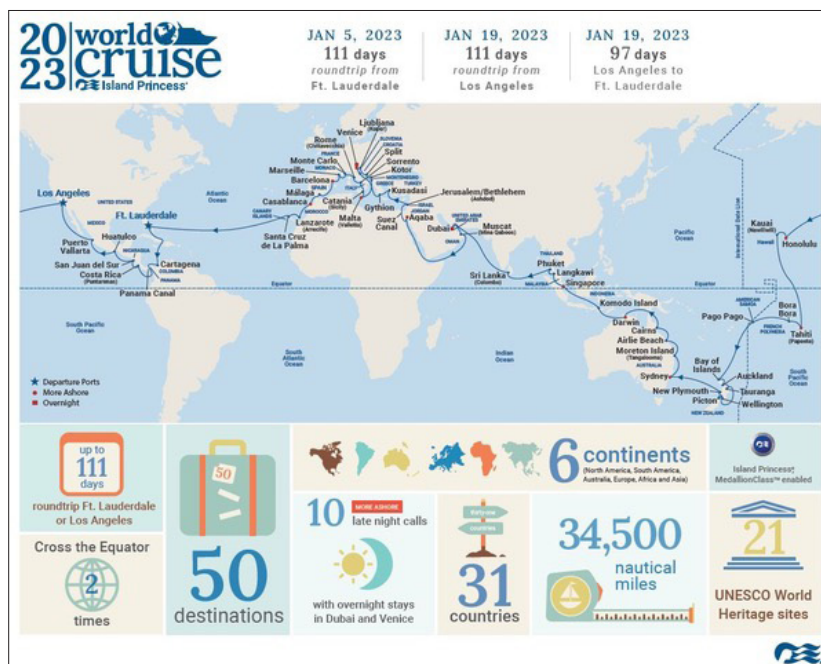
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# Princess Cruises World Cruise 2023

MedallionClass Ship Island Princess Sails the World on a 111-day voyage to 50 Must-See destinations.

Princess Cruises' World Cruise guests have been fulfilling their travel dreams of traversing the globe via a cruise ship for more than two decades. The cruise line's newly-announced 2023 World Cruise itinerary continues to deliver



a destination-packed itinerary to more countries than ever before.

Sailing roundtrip from North America, the 111- or 97-day journey from both Ft. Lauderdale and Los Angeles sets sail in January 2023, onboard Island Princess. Guests will experience 50 destinations across 31 countries and six continents, including Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, South America and North America.

The 111-day roundtrip voyage from Ft. Lauderdale departs on 5 January 2023, and from Los Angeles on 19 January 2023. A 97-day World

Cruise from Los Angeles to Ft. Lauderdale is also offered, setting sail on 19 January 2023.

## Noteworthy 2023 World Cruise details include:

- *Island Princess* will sail 34,500 nautical miles in 111 days.
- Maiden port of call to Gythion, Greece, famously known as the port for ancient Sparta, rich with Greek history.
- Visits to 21 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including the archaeological city of Petra (from

Aqaba, Jordan), Mount Etna (from Catania, Italy) and the ancient Greek city of Ephesus in Turkey.

- The World Cruise will cross the Equator twice.
- The cruise will offer overnight visits Dubai and Venice, and 10 "More Ashore" late-night calls including Singapore, Casablanca, Barcelona, Sydney, Tahiti and Honolulu.
- Destinations visited include Panama Canal, Puntarenas (Costa Rica), Monte Carlo, Valetta (Malta), Muscat (Oman), Phuket, Komodo Island, Bora Bora and many more.

**The 2023 World Cruise's rates start at US\$19,199/person. Guests booking the 97- or 111-day World Cruise by 31 August 2021, receive early booking perks.**

Princess MedallionClass ships also offer the best Wi-Fi at sea, MedallionNet, so guests can stay connected to the things and people they love and share vacation memories with ease. MedallionNet offers unprecedented connectivity that's fast, unlimited, reliable, and affordable.

**More information is available at [www.princess.com/world](http://www.princess.com/world).**

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# Elephant rides replaced by a learning experience

A Thai elephant song reflects the complicated and emotional links between humans and elephants as the elephant's role changes from circus acts to providing daily life insights.

A Thai children's song titled, 'Chang', (Elephant) is probably the very first song most Thai parents sing to their kids as they teach them how to sing. The lyrics ask if the child has ever seen an elephant.



Then they go on to describe the elephant's physical features such as tusks and trunk as it explains the attributes of this magnificent giant of an animal.

The country's most loved animal has a deep bond with Thai social and cultural roots evident in ancient history. The enduring relationship between humans and elephants can be spotted in Thai daily life events today.

At the kindergarten, children are taught the Thai alphabet by pairing the different sounds to different objects. The 10th letter in the Thai alphabet is Cho Chang [ช], representing a 'ch' sound paired to the word 'Chang' to help children memorise the letter. Chang is also a common Thai nickname.

Historical records show that elephants in Thailand have been



domesticated since the Sukhothai Kingdom dating back to the 13th century and are commonly referred to as a symbol of power. They were used to transport royalty on special occasions. In 1851, King Rama IV designated the white elephant emblem as the national flag. Beyond the auspicious symbolism linked to the royal institution, the elephant is portrayed in Buddhism traditions and history.

In the real world, beyond the ancient symbolism, there are signs that the wild elephant population is regrouping and expanding once

more in protected national parks where conservation measures have improved. Wild elephants can be spotted in 69 National Parks across the country, according to the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation. The population

nationally stands at around 3,500, with the biggest concentration in the western forest reserves of Khao Yai-Dong Phrayayen, PhuKhieo – Nam Nao and Kaeng Krachan.

Meanwhile, the captive elephant population registered with the Department of Livestock Development stands at around 3,700. The welfare of the domestic elephant is being revisited. As practices come under review, the domestic elephant's role also needs to adapt to a kinder version of tourism that encourages visitors



to interact with the elephant and understand its daily life and needs.

Both wild and domestic elephants are protected. The country adopted a law to preserve wild elephants back in the early 1900s after logging was banned, and today, stakeholders are working together to improve laws to protect domesticated elephants and improve their welfare. A new animal welfare law and a 'National Elephant Care Master Plan' have been drafted and is now awaiting government approval.

Captive elephants require constant human care to survive. This is evident in the emerging elephant care trend in tourism that promotes a clearer understanding of the bond between elephants and humans and illustrates how they rely on each other. In Thailand, there are elephant conservation parks where visitors can observe the interaction between humans and elephants and learn how these majestic animals are treated with care, love, and respect. There has been a major shift in emphasis over the years from elephants entertaining us to an educational and inspirational experience that explores the bond between humans and elephants. Here are examples of parks that provide an environment that delivers a meaningful and rewarding experience for visitors that will enrich their understanding of Thailand's elephants.

### **Thai Elephant Conservation Center, Lampang**

Founded in 1993 under Royal Patronage, the government-funded elephant conservation offers elephant educational demonstrations that visitors can take part in by helping the mahouts. The centre also demonstrates how elephant dung can be used to make paper products or organic fertiliser. The centre is located on Km28-29 on Lampang-Chiang Mai Highway.



### **Kanta Elephant Sanctuary, Chiang Mai**

Kanta Elephant Sanctuary is a retirement home for elephants that previously worked in entertainment shows or the logging industry. The sanctuary's mission is to provide elephants with good health and freedom. Visitors are encouraged to feed, walk with, and observe the elephants as they roam around in the wild open space. At the sanctuary, there's no training hooks, no ankle chains, and also no riding. Kanta Elephant Sanctuary is located in Mae Taeng District, 50 km from Mueang Chiang Mai District.

### **Patara Elephant Farm, Chiang Mai**

Patara Elephant Farm encourages people to try to experience this special and sacred animal that should be treasured at least once in their lives. "Elephant Owner for a Day" is a special programme that Patara Elephant Farm created for visitors to learn and interact with elephants as if they are the mahout for a day. The hands-on experiences include how to participate, sharing responsibilities and taking care of an elephant. The programme does not include riding any elephants. Patara Elephant Farm is located in Tambon Baan Pong, Amphoe Hang Dong, Chiang Mai.

### **Samui Elephant Sanctuary**

The winner of the 12th Responsible Thailand Awards – Animal Welfare category – it offers tours that provide insights into the lifestyle of these majestic giants. There is an opportunity to feed elephants, walk with them, and observe them as they forage, socialise, and play in the mud pit. Here, human interaction is limited. Letting elephants simply be elephants means visitors can observe their daily life while obtaining some amazing photo opportunities. The sanctuary has two locations on Samui Island; the original site in Bophut opened in 2018, and Chaweng Noi that opened in 2020.

### **Kindred Spirit Elephant Sanctuary in Chiang Mai**

Kindred Spirit Elephant Sanctuary is a foundation, established to bring as many elephants as possible back to their natural habitat. The sanctuary won the 12th Responsible Thailand Awards in Community-based Tourism with projects that provide an income for the local community. The sanctuary offers the option of short-term and long-term visits, as well as volunteer programmes. Kindred Spirit Elephant Sanctuary is located in Baan Naklang, Mae Suek, Mae Chaem District, Chiang Mai.

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# 48 hours in Langkawi

If you are looking to spend a weekend in Langkawi, here's how you can discover and experience it in two days.

Langkawi makes an excellent weekend staycation when you are looking for a getaway from city life. The island is known for its beaches, islets, nature and duty-free status, which makes it a great holiday destination in Malaysia for all sorts of holiday-makers from sun loungers to adventurous nature lovers.

its proximity to the airport and key areas to visit.

If you are looking to spend 48 hours in Langkawi, here's how you can discover and experience it in two days.

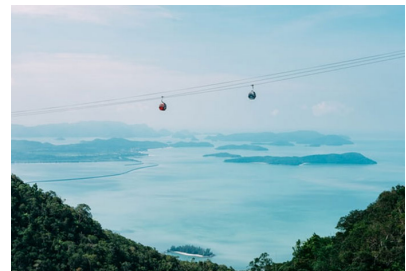
## Day 1

After checking in at Casa del Mar Langkawi, take a 30 minute car ride to the Langkawi Cable Car where you can see the most of Langkawi in the shortest time. The 2.2km-long ride will carry you to the top of Mount Mat Cinchang.

beanbags at one of the beach bars with a drink and lounge to live music until late.

## Day 2

Wake up to a delectable breakfast at Casa del Mar Langkawi to fuel your day before heading out to the Kilim Karst Geoforest Park. Join a guided tour that will take you on a river cruise down the mangrove swamp, limestone caves and formations millions of years old. The adventurous ones can opt to kayak instead, enjoy a different



Spot the White-Bellied Sea Eagle while at the Geoforest Park.

To make sure you enjoy the best of the island during your staycation, picking a hotel in a strategic location is important to minimize your travelling times. Casa del Mar Langkawi, at Pantai Cenang is a boutique hotel in Langkawi to station yourselves, with

While at the peak, take a walk along the 125-metre-long Langkawi Sky Bridge where you get a bird's eye view of an unobstructed view of the many islands of Langkawi on one side, and islands of Thailand on the other.

If you're feeling up for a little adventure, head on towards the TelagaTujuh Waterfalls (Seven Wells Waterfalls) made up of a series of seven connected natural pools fed by seven separate waterfalls. Expect to hike 45 minutes to an hour along a trail with more than 600 steps, but you will be rewarded with the views of Burau Bay and Pantai Kok at the top of the falls.

Return to Pantai Cenang in the evening and unwind on the

experience kayaking through the mangrove swamps. Just be sure to apply a suncream.

After exploring nature, return to the hotel and relax by the pool or beach. In Casa del Mar Langkawi's case, you get to enjoy the best of both since the hotel is located beachfront! You can also opt for a pampering session at Satkara Spa, and allow the masseur to knead your knots and stresses away.

Wind down the evening with pre-dinner drinks by the bar and let the mixologist at Casa del Mar Langkawi shake up your favourite cocktail. Indulge in a beachfront dinner at La Sal and watch the sunset on the horizon as you end your 2-day staycation in Langkawi.



# The Best Tropical Karst Island in the World

*Naturally Inspired: Langkawi*

Naturally  
LANGKAWI





An aerial photograph of a stunning tropical coastline. The water is a vibrant turquoise, transitioning to a deeper blue further out. Lush green hills and islands surround the water. Several boats are visible: a small white boat in the distance, a larger white boat with a blue roof, a small motorboat, and a red boat with a white roof in the foreground. A rope is visible extending from the red boat towards the shore. The text "Amazing moments await you in Amazing Thailand." is written in a white, cursive font across the middle of the image.

Amazing moments await you  
in Amazing Thailand.