

Thailand uncovered

Thailand has developed an image in recent years of busy beaches, brash nightlife and large groups of tourists being lead around temples and shops. We recently sent Natalie Newman, one of our Thailand specialists, on a trip to research some of the country's less developed regions and to experience some interesting new touring ideas.

Pai

Tucked away in the North West in Mae Hong Son province, the region around Pai is renowned for its diverse ethnic minorities. Previously, the accommodation in this region was of a poor standard but the newly opened boutique resort, the 'Belle Villa' has changed all this. It is the perfect place to base yourself for day treks through magnificent scenery to rarely visited villages.

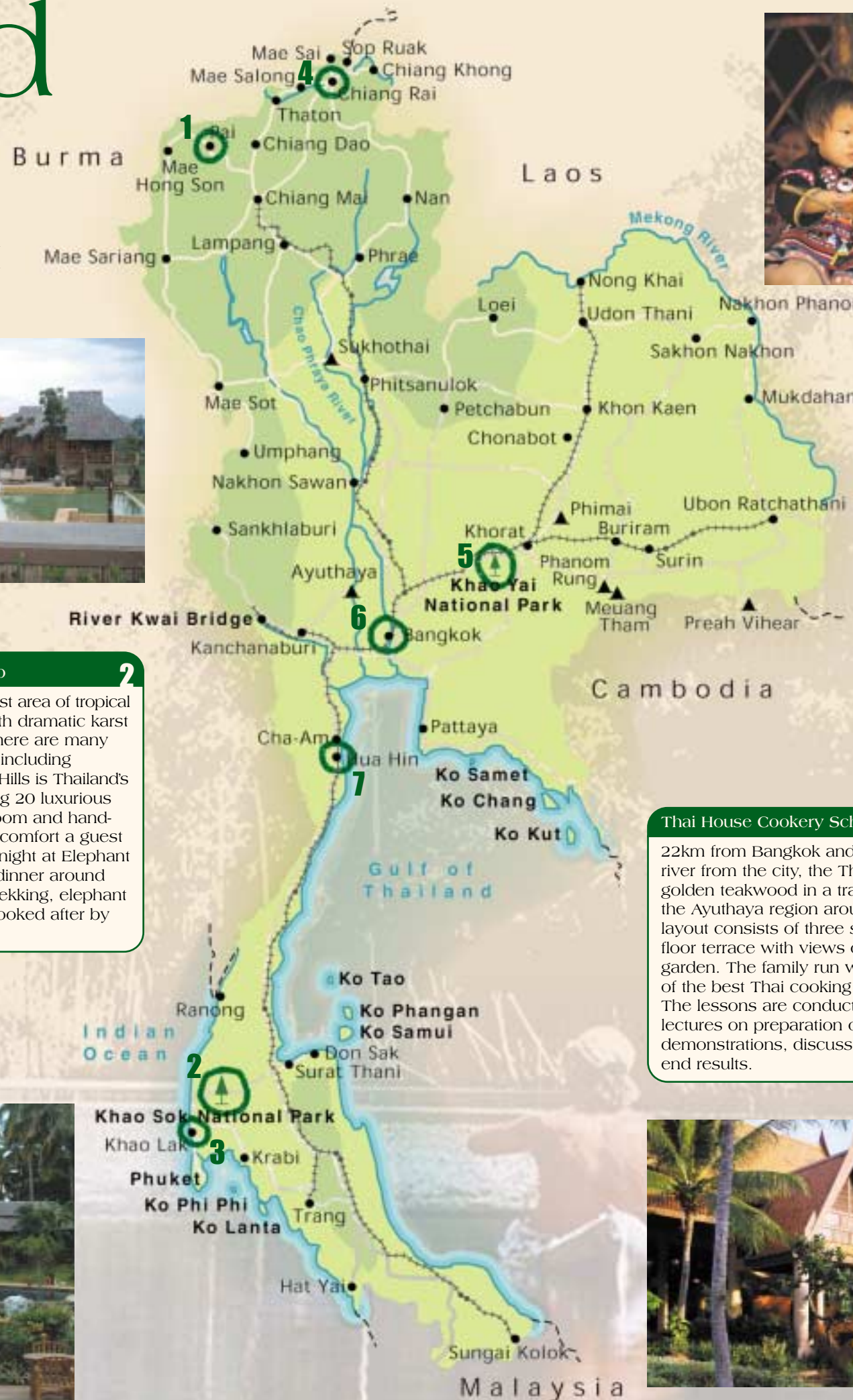


Elephant Hills Luxury Safari Camp

Khao Sok National Park is the largest area of tropical rainforest in southern Thailand with dramatic karst scenery and spectacular lakes. There are many orchids, birds and rare mammals including elephant, tiger and deer. Elephant Hills is Thailand's first luxury jungle camp comprising 20 luxurious tents with fans, an en suite bathroom and hand-made furniture: it provides all the comfort a guest normally finds in a hotel room. A night at Elephant Hills is a unique experience with dinner around the campfire and trips including trekking, elephant riding and canoeing. You will be looked after by your own private naturalist guide.

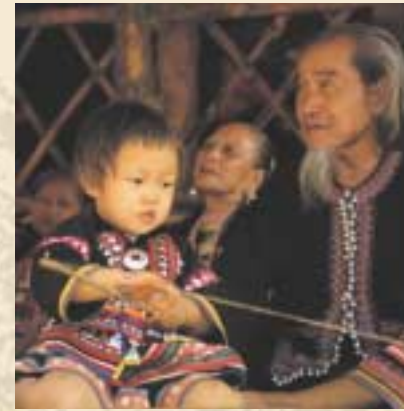
Khao Lak

More remote than some of the busier beach destinations, Khao Lak is likely to become one of Thailand's next big resorts. However, for the time being it is a rarely visited stretch of coastline with a range of accommodation from simple beach bungalows to exclusive five star resorts. There is easy access to the nearby Similan Islands for snorkelling or diving or alternatively, relax in one of the wonderful spas.



Suanthip Vana Resort

Tucked away in the remote north away from the crowds of Chiang Mai, the Sunanthip Vana is a perfect retreat to base your self to explore this scenic region of Thailand. This recently redeveloped resort close to Chiang Rai is an exquisite example of Northern Thai style architecture in a splendid natural setting. The rooftops of the resort blend smoothly into the surrounding woods. Suanthip Vana means Royal Forest and the resort is committed to respecting the rich natural environment of northern Thailand as well as the unique cultural traditions of the region. Your guide will lead you on easy treks to the surrounding hill tribe villages and it may be possible to visit a local school.



Wildlife expeditions in Khao Yai National Park

Audley has teamed up with a local nature specialist to provide two day adventures in one of Thailand's most interesting national parks. Escorted by your private naturalist guide, you will embark on a number of nature hikes in search of gibbons, sambar deer, elephants, hornbills and more. You will also learn about the work of the Khao Yai Conservation Project and the elephant research that goes on there. Overnight accommodation is comfortable and located in the heart of the park.



Thai House Cookery School

22km from Bangkok and accessed by road or river from the city, the Thai House is built from golden teakwood in a traditional style popular in the Ayuthaya region around 150 years ago. The layout consists of three separate wings with a first floor terrace with views overlooking the orchard garden. The family run what is renowned as one of the best Thai cooking courses in the country. The lessons are conducted in English and include lectures on preparation of ingredients, hands on demonstrations, discussion forums and tasting the end results.



The Anantara Resort, Hua Hin

Away from the busier resorts of Phuket, Pattaya and Koh Samui, the area around Hua Hin has experienced something of a renaissance in recent years. First developed as a beach destination in the 1920s, Hua Hin fell out of favour due to the increased popularity of the busier resorts further south. Its re-emergence has coincided with the construction of some fantastic resorts such as the opulent Evason Resort and Spa, and an Audley favourite, the Anantara - decorated with dark wooden Thai furniture with gold detail, the resort has a uniquely Thai feel to it and is a very stylish option. In addition to its two swimming pools, the hotel has its own lagoon where a floating market is held weekly.

