

# "Pachyderms and bamboo rafting, on the river Mae Wang"

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The region of Chiang Mai, which is culturally one of the most typical and also the most visited for its ecological and tourist activities, offers to the visitor willing to experience the inevitable delights that are elephant riding and the descent of river in bamboo raft, a complete day hike...



After our departure from Chiang Mai at eight o'clock in the morning, the group converses with Sulasak our guide, who explains the programme of the day. For most of us, the elephant riding and the rafting will be a first time experience. It is nothing really difficult physically, nor too sporty, and everyone can participate to this trek just like a 70 year-old gentleman in our group is showing us.

Around 50 minutes by vehicle southwards is required to reach a mountainous road bordering the river Mae Wang. The landscapes of mountains traversed are magnificent and one has an opportunity to take pictures of rural life in the villages. In this place few tourists are seen, as they are being sent in convoys of tour coaches to one of the elephant camps especially arranged for them in the North of Chiang Mai. This makes of our excursion an even more privileged one where only a few small groups can gather together and enjoy the surrounding nature.

At the starting point situated along the river, the mahouts have prepared the mounts for us, and the ride begins. An adult elephant supports two people whereas a baby attached to his mother by a rope will take only one passenger, a teenager... The cortege of pachyderms climbs the mountain in zigzags, and allows everybody to admire the forest with its dense cluster of bamboos. After have been swung for one hour on all sides, we arrive at our destination: the middle of the forest! The elephants, full on bananas sold by the neighbouring tribal children, prepare for their descent back to the river while we are pursuing our climb, on foot this time...

This little hike is easy and only 20 minutes are needed to reach a Hmong village named Huey Nam Rin. There, our guide explains to us that the houses are constructed at ground level and are grouped together to form the village where the Hmongs are divided into clans. It is not only possible to have a cold drink while going for a walk in the small local market that sells hand-made products, but also to explore the more authentic part, which is a little farther.

Half an hour later, we leave the village and start going down through the forest following a different path than the one taken by the elephants. This will take us back to the river over a tiny suspended bridge. The vehicle is waiting there and the group heads toward a local restaurant in a neighbouring village for lunch. The afternoon starts with a visit to Huey Takhrai, a Karen village of about twenty houses on stilts situated this time on the side of the road, and where we can observe the women weaving by hand. After this short visit our group goes to the waterfalls of Moradok to enjoy a moment of leisure on the rocks or under the cascades.

We reach the river and step on board bamboo rafts guided by local helmsmen. Three people occupy each raft, two in the centre and one at the rear to become the second helmsman. He will share the navigation during the descent of this long, calm stream. It is always amazing to discover different landscapes and ambiances from what can be seen from the road. Our flotilla of bamboos sails to the melody of the birds and the rhythm of water, which is a little more agitated in some places amidst a very pleasant breeze. One hour has past and we already regret that this is finished!

It is a very busy day that ends and has given to every participant an everlasting memory of traditional Thailand, at the door of the Rose of the North, in Chiang Mai...

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Michel Gerard is a Travel author based in Asia. Visit the *Reperages Thailand Travel* website for information and ideas of original excursions. Download your \*free\* ebook: "Stories of Authentic Eco-adventure Destinations for Travellers in Thailand" => <http://www.travel.reperages-thailand.com>