Thailand's Highlights

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Fly London to Bangkok, Chiang Mai
Day 2 - 4	Arrive Chiang Mai; transfer Doi Inthanon (3 nights)
Day 5 - 7	Doi Lang (3 nights)
Day 8 - 10	Fly Bangkok; transfer Kaeng Krachan (3 nights)
Day 11 - 12	Phetchaburi (2 nights)
Day 13 - 15	Khao Yai (3 nights)
Day 16	Transfer Bangkok (1 night)
Day 17	Depart Bangkok; arrive London

Departs

January-March

Focus

Birds & Mammals

Grading

A/B. Day walks in humid conditions, at times.

Highlights

- Oriental birdwatching at its best
- Excellent chance of seeing Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Giant Nuthatch & Mrs. Hume's Pheasant
- Long-tailed Broadbill, Green Magpie, gibbons and possibility of other forest mammals
- Endangered Yellow-breasted Bunting
- Encounter Himalayan species on Doi Inthanon & Doi Lang







Mrs. Hume's Pheasant, Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Black-and-red Broadbill

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Introduction

Thailand's many natural history attributes have made it one of the most popular far eastern destinations for birders. This exciting Naturetrek tour, led by an exceptional Thai birder, visits some of Thailand's premier birdwatching locations, including Kaeng Krachan National Park and Khao Yai National Park in the central regions, and Doi Lang and Doi Inthanon in the north, where we aim to concentrate on finding a host of Himalayan species which winter here.

Amongst the possible 400 species of birds we could see on this trip, we hope to find such critically endangered species as Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Nordmann's Greenshank, Asian Dowitcher and Yellow-breasted Bunting, as well as other highly sought-after species, including Giant Nuthatch, Mrs. Hume's Pheasant, Himalayan Cutia, Dark-sided Thrush, three species of forktails and two species of pitta!

Visiting in January/February will also allow us the opportunity to seek out a number of wintering Siberian species, many of which cause excitement when they turn up in the UK in our autumns: White's and Eyebrowed Thrushes, Siberian Rubythroat and a plethora of brightly coloured flycatchers could all be on show for us to enjoy.

Of course, there are those iconic species, such as the spectacular Great Hornbill, Blue Pitta, a number of broadbill species and many more which will provide us with such memorable birding highlights throughout this special trip to South-east Asia.

Guided by one of Thailand's top birders, with a diverse range of habitats and an extraordinary cast of species, it is easy to see why this trip is a must for any keen birder.



Doi Inthanon

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1 In Flight

We depart London in the morning on a flight to Chiang Mai via Bangkok, arriving the following morning.

Day 2 - 4 Doi Inthanon



Green-tailed Sunbird

We'll be met on arrival at Chiang Mai by our guide and then transfer to our base near the entrance to Doi Inthanon National Park. Doi Inthanon is the highest mountain in Thailand and rises to over 2,500 metres. We will stay near the park for three nights and fully utilise our time to explore the dry dipterocarp forests of the lower slopes and the evergreen tracts nearer the summit. Inthanon has a great reputation as one of the best birdwatching locations in northern Thailand and a small patch of swamp near the radar station which crowns the summit has produced many rare birds for visiting birdwatchers over the years.

A surfaced road winds from the base of the mountain to the summit, permitting easy access to the various levels of vegetation. Any tour member with experience of the Himalayas will find some familiar birds at the higher elevations of Doi Inthanon, species such as Ashy-throated Warbler, Silver-eared Mesia, Bar-throated Minla and Rufous-backed Sibia. A peevish churring call may draw our attention to a curious little Slaty-bellied Tesia bouncing from branch to branch like an animated golf-ball, another bird also found in Himalayan evergreen forests. Green-tailed Sunbirds are common at this altitude, the male a stunningly beautiful bird with maroon mantle, crimson breast and iridescent blue-green head and tail. Mrs. Gould's Sunbird is another firm favourite which also resides at the same altitude as Green-tailed.

As we explore the forested slopes of the mountain, we will again be looking for mixed species feeding flocks which are likely to have different components to the bird waves encountered at the slightly lower elevations. Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Striated Yuhina, White-bellied Erpornis and Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher are four typical members of these flocks, whilst associated species may include Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Clicking Shrike-babbler and Red-billed Scimitar-babbler.

Elsewhere in the forest there are many other interesting birds with lifestyles which do not include habitually joining the feeding flocks, although all birds are opportunist feeders and some individuals may attach themselves to such a flock as it passes by. Some of the other forest residents include Green-billed Malkoha, Golden-throated and Great Barbets, Rosy and Scarlet Minivets, Blue-winged and Orange-bellied Leafbirds, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Blue-winged Minla, Black-crested and Mountain Bulbuls, Ashy Drongo, Maroon Oriole, Grey Treepie, Yellow-cheeked Tit, Martens' and Bianchi's Warblers, Grey Bush Chat, Little Pied Flycatcher and Black-naped Monarch.

Wherever there are suitable clearings in the forest we are likely to find Olive-backed Pipits quietly spending their winter searching for insects below the trees. Leaf warblers abound in the forest and with over a dozen species possible, enthusiasts will find plenty of wingbars and superciliums to sort through on frustratingly mobile little birds. Separating Davison's (White-tailed) from Blyth's Leaf Warblers is not the easiest of tasks and is made even harder by the hyper-active behaviour of these canopy dwellers; Chinese and Claudia's Leaf Warblers are other species which we may also find.


Slaty-backed Forktail

At the summit (at around 2,565 metres) we may find Himalayan Shortwing, Pygmy Cupwing and Snowy-browed Flycatcher, before we start to descend. At mid-elevation, we will look for Chestnut-vented Nuthatch as we walk to the lower slopes of the mountain, passing through forests inhabited by six or more species of bulbuls, barbets, woodpeckers and warblers as well as the likes of Verditer Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Fantail and Large Niltava. Other surprises might include a shrike-sized Collared Falconet, Hume's Treecreeper or perhaps a Chinese Francolin uttering his monotonous 'song' from a concealed perch. Slaty-backed Forktails add their grace and beauty to little streams bubbling under the trees and Black Eagles occasionally soar on broad wings over the canopy. Two other water-lovers that we should find along the tumbling streams are the Himalayan duo of White-capped and Plumbeous Water Redstarts.

The abundant birdlife of Doi Inthanon will keep us fully occupied during our stay and we will attempt to see as much as we can in the time available. As always in forest habitats, some birds can be frustratingly elusive, while other unexpected species may suddenly appear, but with so much to look for we are unlikely to be disappointed. Apart from the birds mentioned above other, possibilities include Large Hawk-cuckoo, Chestnut-crowned Warbler, White-browed Scimitar-babbler, Spectacled Barwing, Grey-backed Shrike, Chestnut-flanked White-eye and Common Rosefinch. We are unlikely to find many mammals apart from squirrels, but lovers of butterflies will find another profusion of insects to supplement their earlier observations.

We will stay 3 nights at Inthanon Highland Resort or Touch Star Resort close to Doi-Inthanon National Park.

Day 5 - 7 Doi Lang

After our time in Doi Inthanon, we drive to Tha Ton to explore the bird-rich area of Doi Lang. Doi Lang can only be described as a 'must visit' birdwatching location for any visit to Thailand. On the border of Myanmar (Burma), the lush, yet sparsely forested hillsides support a wonderful range of Himalayan and localised species. One of the 'most wanted' species on this hillside is Mrs. Hume's Pheasant, a bird which requires patience and luck as we wait at a baited area along a single-track road.



Giant Nuthatch

Other birds which only occur here on our circuit of the country are Brown-breasted Bulbul, Giant Nuthatch, Crested Finchbill, Fire-tailed Sunbird, Mountain Bamboo Partridge, Slender-billed Oriole, Aberrant Bush-warbler, Himalayan Cutia, Grey-headed Parrotbill, Spot-breasted Parrotbill, Golden-throated Barbet, Crested Bunting and Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-babbler to name but a few. Small clearings with 'feeding stations' are yet other areas which support some very approachable species. Siberian Rubythroats and Slaty-blue, White-gorgeted and Ultramarine Flycatchers can all be very photogenic.

Our time up in the mountains here will be (hopefully) superb with a long list of excellent birds and wonderful panoramic views. If we succeed in finding many of the above, our remaining time in this area will be spent in the nearby paddies and open fields. Although not as birdy as the forested mountains, the open fields and ditches are home to Horsfield's Bush Lark and Greater Painted-snipe, whilst dense hedgerows will provide us with another opportunity to look for Yellow-breasted Bunting, as well as Eurasian Wryneck, Plain-backed Sparrow and Striated Heron.

We will spend three nights in Doi Lang at the Maekok River Village Resort, located on the banks of the Mae Kok River.

Day 8 Fly Bangkok, transfer to Kaeng Krachan NP

This morning we'll leave Doi Lang and take a flight from Chiang Rai to Bangkok, from where we'll then transfer to Baan Maka Resort within Kaeng Krachan National Park.

Day 9- 10 Kaeng Krachan National Park

Kaeng Krachan National Park is one of the largest of its kind in Thailand and home to over 300 species of birds as well as several incredible mammals. Due to the rapid change in elevation within the park, a good range of species can be found in a relatively short space of time.

Amongst the common Grey-headed Canary-flycatchers, Indochinese Blue Flycatchers, Oriental Pied Hornbills and Yellow-browed Warblers, notable species will hopefully include Black-and-red and Black-and-yellow Broadbills, Tickell's Brown Hornbill, White-fronted Scops Owl, Grey Peacock-pheasant, Red-bearded Bee-eater and Black-thighed Falconet. In fact, around almost any corner can reveal a surprise, so we must be alert at all times as a Rufous-browed Flycatcher or Golden Babbler may be lurking. Mammals could include Sun Bear, White-handed Gibbon and Dusky and Robinson's Banded Langurs.

For green pigeon fans, we have the chance to find Thick-billed, Yellow-footed, Wedge-tailed and Orange-breasted Green Pigeons. Despite the extensive forest, birds of prey can be hard to come by but we should find Besra, Shikra and both Changeable and Mountain Hawk-eagles.



Siberian Blue Robin

Other activities on the outskirts of the park will include visiting a hide which is excellent for providing intimate views of many forest-dwelling species, including some that are near-impossible to find within the park. Regular birds here often include Green-legged Partridge, Puff-throated Babbler and Siberian Blue Robin, but every so often, Large Scimitar Babbler, Slaty-legged Crake, Bar-backed Partridge, Eared Pitta and Kalij Pheasant turn up. Mammals feeding on the leftover fruit here often include Lesser Mouse Deer, one of the smallest deer in the world!

Leisurely time at our wonderful accommodation at Baan Maka Lodge will allow us time to visit more hides, relax, or gently walk around the lake which supports populations of Stork-billed Kingfishers, Black-browed Reed Warbler, Bronze-winged Jacana and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, whilst the grounds have become a regular haunt for Chinese Blue Flycatcher, Siberian Rubythroat, Black-hooded Oriole and Forest Wagtail.

These few days within the boundaries of the park, which has just a single road running through it, will be a highlight of our visit to Thailand and ample time here will prove to be one of the highlights of the trip.

Whilst in Kaeng Krachan we will spend three nights at Baan Maka Nature Lodge, which is situated in five hectares of gardens, forest & farmland.

Days 11 – 12 Phetchaburi


Nordmann's Greenshank

Today, we'll drive towards the coast of Phetchaburi, locally dubbed the "capital of bird watching". At Baan Pak Tale, we will be hoping to see the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper, a species that migrates from its northern Siberian breeding range down the Pacific coast to the main wintering grounds in South and South-east Asia. Spoon-billed Sandpiper has been a regular wintering species at Phetchaburi and we will be eagerly hoping to find this small, attractive wader - we'll keep a look out for their distinctively shaped bills and their feeding style, which consists of a side-to-side motion of the bill as the bird walks forward with its head down.

In addition to Spoon-billed Sandpipers, many rare visitors have been recorded here, including Asiatic Dowitcher and Nordmann's Greenshank, while Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers, Broad-billed Sandpiper and Long-toed and Red-necked Stints, among many others, make this such a wonderful destination. Up to 30 species of wader can be seen in one day just on these saltpans!

Our time in Phetchaburi will also be spent inland, searching for wintering flocks of birds that will hopefully contain Yellow-breasted Buntings – one of the fastest declining species in Asia. Usually mixed in are a number of starling species, including Siamese Pied Myna and Brahminy and White-shouldered Starlings. Eastern Yellow Wagtails, Paddyfield and Richard's Pipits and Brown Shrikes will be numerous across the various paddies and fields. Pied and Eastern Marsh Harriers cruise over the many fields here, the former being one of the most striking birds of prey in Asia. We will also hope for


Yellow-breasted Bunting

the distinctive Black Baza, while Greater Spotted Eagle is now a regular wintering species to the area.

These two nights will be at the Fisherman's Resort, an exclusive retreat set in a private enclave fronting the beach and which has successfully blended the comforts and services of a luxury resort with the authentic tradition and heritage of Thai architecture.

Day 13 - 15 Khao Yai National Park

This morning, we will drive north to Khao Yai National Park. The 542,000 acres of hills which comprise the Khao Yai National Park embrace dry, deciduous areas on the lower slopes and damp, evergreen forest at higher elevations, interspersed with patches of open grassland. Among the mammals found here are herds of Sambar, Red Muntjac, Pig-tailed Macaque and noisy, White-handed Gibbons which announce each dawn with a frenzy of hooting. Each evening, millions of Wrinkle-lipped Free-tailed Bats emerge from their roosting caves, extending like a plume of smoke over the forest as they set off to begin feeding, and on our way back from a first afternoon in the park, we will be able to witness this extraordinary phenomenon.

A surfaced road ascends to the highest point of the reserve at over 1,300 metres and from this, a network of trails provides access to the forest. Some of these are no more than short tracks, while others can be explored for 10 kilometres or more through pristine habitat, following the course of rushing streams which tumble over picturesque waterfalls as they wind along the contours of the hills. Blue Whistling Thrushes may be found along these streams, whilst both Slaty-backed and White-crowned Forktails inhabit favoured stretches where forest vegetation forms a canopy over the water. The diversity of birds to be found in the park is impressive but, like all forested areas, Khao Yai does not easily reveal all its secrets, and a degree of patience is needed to find some of the more retiring inhabitants. Siamese Fireback, Silver Pheasant and Red Junglefowl are other ground-dwelling species that we will also be keeping an eye out for.



Wrinkle-lipped Free-tailed bats emerging from a roost

Mixed species feeding flocks are a feature of tropical forests and an encounter with some of these is likely to introduce a number of new birds with each successive wave. Pin-striped Tit-babbler, Abbott's Babbler, White-bellied Erpornis, Sulphur-breasted Warbler and Green-billed Malkoha are often among the species to be found in these energetic flocks. The park's secretive paths are perfect for slowly stalking the forest and hoping for a chance encounter of an Eared Pitta or Silver Pheasant.

Broadbills are regularly seen, especially the cartoon character-like Long-tailed Broadbill, though Banded Broadbill and Dusky Broadbill can also be found with luck.

On one afternoon, we will be patient at a screen in the vain hope a Blue Pitta will hop into the 'arena'. White-crested Laughingthrushes, Orange-breasted Trogons and Siberian Blue Robins also favour these cleared areas, which are usually baited by Thai bird photographers, but this will give us our best opportunity to find these elusive birds.


Siamese Fireback

Several species of *Phylloscopus* warblers are common in these forests, from the more familiar Yellow-browed to a confusing mixture of individuals sporting wing bars and crown stripes which require careful watching to separate into species. Three or four species are likely, and the very subtle differences can make identification a tricky process! Rather easier to identify are the wintering Radde's Warblers skulking in roadside vegetation, or the Thick-billed Warblers inhabiting a similar habitat near one of the reserve pools. This same area also witnesses an evening gathering of Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters heading to a communal roost, while at dusk, harrier-sized Great Eared Nightjars emerge to glide over the forest. Brown-backed Needletails will be another wonderful experience to witness as we wait for them to descend from the heights and feed over one of the pools in the park.

Over 200 bird species have been recorded at Khao Yai, ensuring that even with the limited time at our disposal we are guaranteed a tremendous addition to our Thailand holiday.

There is, however, much more to Khao Yai than just the birdlife, stunning though it is. Although only a few hours from Bangkok, the reserve contains some of the best remaining tracts of lowland forest in Thailand and is a haven for all forms of wildlife. The flora is impressive, butterfly enthusiasts will find scores of brightly coloured insects to delight them and even herpetologists will not feel neglected as they search for the many reptiles, ranging from flying lizards and geckos to various species of snakes.

Three nights will be spent at the Recall Isaan Resort, a five-star property focusing on the charming culture of 'Isaan', which is the name to describe the north-eastern area of Thailand.

Day 16 Khao Yai/Bangkok

We will spend a final morning at Khao Yai, after which we'll drive to our airport hotel to spend a necessary night. Depending on the time available we may be able to do a little shopping or sightseeing before turning in for the night.

Our final night in Thailand will be back at Bangkok near the airport at Miracle Airport Hotel, Golden Jade Hotel or similar.

Day 17 Depart Bangkok; arrive London

We will leave Bangkok this morning on a direct flight back to London.

Tour Grading & Focus

B. Day walks, but there are some long days to maximise time in the field. This is a tour focussed on seeing a special range of birds, covering a great range of habitats and different sites through Thailand. It will be a fairly fast paced tour as we seek a range of species every day and as you can see from the itinerary, we move to various different locations and accommodations throughout the tour. Whilst we hope to succeed in seeing the species mentioned in the itinerary, it of course can take perseverance and patience and at times when birding in dense forested habitats, sightings can be brief and fleeting at times. We may also undertake some nocturnal birding in search of owls and nightjars. This itinerary is designed for the keen birder with birds being the distinct focus, but we will also seek some special mammals too with the chance of Asian Elephant, Lar Gibbon and a range of deer and squirrel species.

It is well worth considering flying out a day or two early so you can recover from the long journey and jetlag ahead of a long and action packed tour.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

In the lowlands, the weather should be pleasantly warm or hot and humid by day, with evenings usually cooler. In the northern hills it will be generally cooler, and it can become particularly cold at night around Doi Inthanon. Binoculars are of course essential for this holiday, while a telescope will be useful, if you have one. Cameras are recommended and sturdy footwear and long trousers with long-sleeved shirts are a must to avoid insect bites. Snakes are present in the lowlands, so it may be necessary to wear wellies, but of course this is only a mild precaution. Leech socks won't be needed.

What's Included

The tour cost includes all meals and drinking water throughout. The meals start with lunch on day one after arrival and end with lunch on the final day in Khao Yai. For your final night spent near the airport, dinner is at your own expense, and you should allow around £20 to cover the cost.

Extending Your Holiday

We can arrange many popular extensions to this holiday so please speak to your operations manager if you would like further details.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request a copy via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements at the time of booking.

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