

Postcard from



Chiang Mai

Chiang Mai is the second largest City in Thailand and is located in the northern highlands, approximately 696km north of the capital Bangkok and about 130km from the Myanmar border, and the infamous Golden Triangle.

Chiang Mai's official population is difficult to gauge and the official figure which appears to have been last recorded in 1990 was 167,000. Current estimates claim that the figure is now around 1,547,085 for Chiang Mai Province, with about 170,348 of those currently living in the city of Chiang Mai itself.

Chiang Mai is the gateway to Northern Thailand and is the chief economic centre for Northern Thailand, supported by a well developed transport infrastructure. There are plans to make Chiang Mai International Airport a regional hub to support the massive volume of international flights currently serviced by Bangkok.

Founded in 1296, Chiang Mai is located on the site of an 11th century settlement which was the capital and religious centre of the Lanna Thai Kingdom. From 1558 to 1775 Chiang Mai was part of Burma, and was then semi-independent until it was

incorporated into the modern Thailand (Siam) in the late 19th century.

Chiang Mai is administratively divided into 22 districts with the surrounding areas made up of various minority groups such as Karen, Lahu, Hmong, Lisu, Lua, Akha, Mien and Palong groups. These people rely heavily on agriculture for their income and many vendors can be seen wandering around Chiang Mai's infamous Night Bazaar selling their brightly coloured wares and trinkets. Strangely enough many of these hill tribe vendors actually speak better English than Thai, as each hill tribe generally has its own unique dialect.

The majority of people in the Chiang Mai Province make their living from agriculture or related activities. Tourism is

the second largest vocation in the Chiang Mai Region which receives a large influx of tourists annually.

The province is renowned for its cultural heritage with more than 300 temples and a quaint historical aura; you can still view the old moat and parts of the walls that encircled the old city. Chiang Mai is home to one of Thailand's holiest temples in Wat Doi Suthep which provides a breathtaking view of the city at night.

The AFP initially opened an office in Chiang Mai in January 1990 with Federal Agent Bernie Doyle as the Senior Liaison Officer until January 1994. Even today, Bernie's Elvis impersonations are legendary among some of the longer-serving members of the Royal Thai Police in Chiang Mai. The office was closed in May 1996 when Federal Agent Darryl Gossip completed his term as the Senior Liaison Officer.

In 2002, the AFP commissioned a feasibility study along with other offices in strategically selected countries under the EX-16 program. As a result of the study, the Commissioner officially opened the new Chiang Mai Office on 13 June 2003.

Federal Agent Roland Singor was the initial Team Leader and commenced duty in June 2003. In December 2004 the office was relocated to a purpose-built office providing a more secure working environment.

The Chiang Mai Office is responsible for all Northern Thailand, and works closely with the Bangkok Office to ensure that liaison and investigations are conducted in a coordinated manner.

Chiang Mai provides ideal conduit for narcotics leaving the Golden Triangle for the world market. The Northern Region Headquarters, Provincial Police Region 5 (PPR5), is located in Chiang Mai and maintains responsibility for eight upper northern provinces which include Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lampang, Phayao, Phrae, Nan, Lamphun, and Mae Hong Son. The area under the jurisdiction of PPR5 covers 80,180.90 sq/km with 152 police stations. There are 94 district police stations, eight sub-district police stations and 50 village police stations with 16,060 officers stationed throughout the region. There are 1,749 commissioned officers and 14,311 non-commissioned officers.

PPR5 is under the command of Police Lieutenant General Panupong Singhara Na Ayudhya.

He has five Deputy Commissioners:

1. Police Major General Kittitat Ruanthip - responsible for the prevention and suppression of the illegal logging, National Park encroachment, national resources abuse, vehicle theft, oil and fuel trafficking and maritime robbery;
2. Police Major General Suwat Krungkrai - responsible for the prevention and suppression of human trafficking and maintaining social order;
3. Police Major General Wuthi Vititanond - responsible for the prevention and suppression of narcotics trafficking, dark influences and hired gunmen, monitoring all levels of elections and supervising PPR5 information technology and communications;
4. Police Major General Panthawat Srivalai - responsible for the prevention and suppression of transnational organised crime, cross-border criminal activity, illegal immigration and the violation of intellectual treasures; and
5. Police Major General Theerasak Chukitkhun - responsible for the development of all PPR 5 offices and personnel, establishment of the Police Station for All program, and internal affairs.

The AFP Chiang Mai Office enjoys a very strong relationship with the Commissioner of the PPR5 and enjoys very good cooperation from the Investigations Department who handle the majority of our non-narcotic related enquiries. PPR5 have recently conducted a number of



paedophile investigations on our behalf and the quality of their work has been very high.

Chiang Mai is a strategically significant city in the movement of narcotics and is also home to an office of the Police Narcotics Suppression Bureau (NSB). The AFP has a long standing relationship with the NSB and Chiang Mai is no exception.

Team Leader Chiang Mai, Federal Agent Clint Guthridge has been able to re-establish friendships with people he met during trips to the city when he filled the position of Liaison Officer in Bangkok several years ago.

The office also enjoys a particularly good relationship with the Chiang Mai Intelligence Centre and now that office administration has been completed, it is expected that this relationship will see a substantial increase in the flow of intelligence relevant to the AFP.

The office is unique in that it is a stand-alone office not located within an Embassy or Consular premises and this in itself has presented a number of challenges. Many of the business aspects that are taken for granted in an Embassy or Consular posts have had to be reviewed and amended.

The new Australian Ambassador to Thailand, H.E. Mr Bill Paterson PSM recently attended Chiang Mai to host a function to introduce the new Honorary Consul. Ambassador Paterson is a strong supporter of the AFP and took this opportunity to promote our presence.

After the Indian Ocean tsunamis, Federal Agent Guthridge joined the AFP team in Phuket to work with the disaster relief effort.

"The work of all the DVI teams was outstanding with the efforts of all concerned and the ability of so many to work together in pursuit of one goal," he said.

"It was not just one multi-jurisdictional task force, but a truly multinational effort and everyone was able to get on with what was one of the most difficult tasks anyone could possibly ever undertake.

"Thailand, and for that matter many countries, have never encountered a disaster of the magnitude of the tsunami and it was a learning experience for all concerned. The AFP was the first DVI team to become operational on the ground and this was achieved on the back of our reputation in Thailand.

"The attitude of the Thai people in the face of such adversity was simply amazing and I think we could all learn from the way they conducted themselves.

"Their ability to cope with adversity was never more evident than when working at Wat Yan Yao or site 'one' as it was commonly known. The memory of talking to a 90-year-old fisherman who had lost everything in the disaster will remain with me forever. He had lost his whole family, his house and everything he had worked his entire life for, but despite this still managed to smile."



Chiang Mai provides many challenges and even minor everyday tasks can prove difficult as the English language is not widely spoken outside the tourist areas; even shopping can be intimidating to some. Many of the Armed Forces in Chiang Mai and surrounds have only a limited command of English.

The office is currently staffed by one AFP Team Leader and one Locally Engaged Staff member, but there are plans to increase this to two to ensure the office can provide greater responsiveness. At present the DEA and the AFP are the only international law enforcement agencies to have a presence in Chiang Mai.

The majority of the Chiang Mai office work focuses on narcotic trafficking and the flow of drugs emanating from the Golden Triangle region. While narcotics continue to be a priority, the office is noticing an increase in child sex offences.

There is also an increased incidence of human trafficking with girls from the

surrounding regions being employed in bars throughout Thailand. A number of these girls find themselves victims of international trafficking rings with most of the organisers being based in Bangkok.

The AFP has a long history in Thailand and enjoys a good relationship with the local law enforcement and government organisations. Now that the new office has been opened and AFPNet installed, the Chiang Mai

Office will now shift its focus to operational issues, which will see an increased flow of intelligence relevant to the AFP's crime management strategies.

A number of LECP interventions have already been implemented will serve to enhance our operational effectiveness in the future.

