

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR FIRST PHOTO ADVENTURE IN THAILAND

Quick Guide
Written by Kevin Landwer-Johan



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Your first photo adventure in Thailand will be an awesome experience. Thailand overflows with culture, color, and characters waiting for you to come and photograph them.

Knowing some of what to expect from your first photo adventure in Thailand will help you make the most of it. I've been a photographer in Thailand for the past 17 years, almost half my career. Let me share with you some insights so your first trip to Thailand will be a most fruitful photography adventure.

DON'T BE A TOURIST SNAPSHOOTER


During your first photo adventure in Thailand, don't be a tourist snaphooter. It's so easy to rely on a good subject to make a good photo. The problem is, often they don't. A good subject does not make a good photo – a good photographer does. This is a key lesson to keep in mind while traveling in Thailand.

Thailand has so many attractive subjects to photograph, from the beautiful people, to temples, tuk tuks and more. You may want to make snapshots of the most iconic subjects and be satisfied with them. Don't be!

Take your time to stop and create meaningful photos of the most interesting subjects. Every photographer has to return home from Thailand with at least one

photo of a monk, temple, and tuk-tuk. When you do photograph these and other iconic things in Thailand, be sure to consider:

- lighting,
- composition,
- timing, and
- how you're feeling.

 **Recommended Reading:** If you'd like to improve your photography skills and create compelling images, grab a copy of our [Powerful Imagery](#) premium guide by award-winning travel photographer [Michell Kanashkevich](#).



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan

Don't rely on the subject alone to make a good photo. Think about how you can make the best photo possible, especially with the typical subjects that tourists take photos of.

One way to create photos with more unique impact is to think about how you are feeling. When you find something you want to photograph, ask yourself what's attracted you. Why do you want to take a photo of this subject? Ponder this before you bring your camera to your eye. You will view your subject in a different way. You'll most likely then capture the essence of what's drawn you in to want to take a photo.

Lighting can make or break a photo. Sometimes when we're traveling, we only have one opportunity to photograph something. Waiting until the evening blue hour to photograph a stunning temple is not always possible. But when you can, wait. Be in the right place at the right time to capture your photos with the best light.



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan

Always compose well. Think about everything you can see in your frame. Is it all necessary to your photo? Can you change your point of view to avoid seeing some clutter in the background? Use the rule of thirds, leading lines, and other compositional techniques to make your photos of Thailand more interesting.

Take your time. Don't be in a rush and try to photograph everything. Spend time with what you find most attractive. Wait until the optimum time to take your photos. Look for repetition. Whether you're photographing monks receiving alms at dawn or you're in the fresh market, there are patterns of action to observe. Figuring these out will help you time your photos with precision.



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan

THE LAND OF SMILES

Thailand is often referred to as 'The Land of Smiles,' and for good reason. Thai people smile! Thais are often relaxed and friendly, which also makes it easier for you to photograph them. This is especially so in the north of the country where the pace of life is slow and easygoing.

It's different than in the West where people can be so paranoid of photographers. Even when you can't speak any Thai language, it is easy to communicate. Catch someone's eye, show them your camera and give a slight nod in their direction, and smile.

Watching for their response will give you an answer. People will usually smile back at you, which means you have their permission. If they shake their head or wave their hand at you, this means they'd prefer you don't take their picture. In all my years doing street photography in Thailand I have never once had anyone shout at me or take offense. The two main reasons for this are:

- Thai people are pretty chill about being photographed and are generally very polite, and
- a careful, respectful approach goes a long way.

Hopefully your first photo adventure to Thailand will include lots of photos of the people you encounter. People make the culture. A travel album of photos devoid of people will not represent your experience here.

Every day you will meet lovely Thai people as you travel. It might only be the staff at your hotel or at the restaurants you eat at. Take their photos. They are the least likely people to say no to you. As you visit the sights and shop in the markets, photograph

the locals you meet along the way. Many will speak some English, many will not. Don't let a verbal language barrier stop you from interacting.

Thais love to have a conversation. Sometimes it may only be with gestures and smiles, and often this will be enough. Show an interest in what people are doing or selling. They will warm to you and be more open to you taking their pictures.

Locals may respond differently in touristic places. This is the same in any country. I think this is why lots of photographers prefer to get off the beaten track. They like to catch a glimpse of what real life is like. Around the tourist sights you'll have many good photo opportunities. But once you're away from them, photographing people will be better.



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan

CLIMATE AND LOCATION VARIETY

Whenever and wherever you plan to travel, your first photo adventure to Thailand will be full of variety. Coming in December or January to the north, the cool mornings and evenings may surprise you. Down south on Koh Samui you might encounter wet weather in November. Everywhere in April will be hot.

Thailand has three seasons in the north: from November to March it's cool and dry; from March to June it's hot and dry; and from June to October it's the rainy season. In the south there are two seasons: wet and dry. On the west of the peninsula, the wet season is from April to October. In the east, the rain falls most between September and December.

Many tourists avoid the rains. Generally, it does not rain for much of the day, so there's still plenty of time to get your camera out. If you're a keen landscape photographer, the wet season is by far the best time to visit Thailand.

During the wet season is when the rice fields get planted. Throughout the country this means you will see oceans of green in rural farmlands. During the growing season the rice morphs through different shades of green. In the south you'll find vast flat fields for as far as the eye can see. In the north you're more likely to find terraces of paddies rising up from the valley floors between the hills.

Coastal areas in the south provide photographers ample opportunities. Beach and boating photography are always popular. If underwater photography is your thing, you'll love the clear waters and tropical fish.

Bangkok is in a category of its own. The city never sleeps. Stopping there on your first photo adventure

to Thailand you will capture some unique images. From the mall and skyscrapers, to a water taxi on a narrow canal, the opulence of the Grand Palace and multitudes of temples to the streets and back alleys of Chinatown, you are sure to run out of time before you capture every image you want to take.

In the north you'll love Chiang Mai and many other smaller towns dotted around in the mountains. You can encounter elephants up close to photograph in the many elephant camps. Visiting ethnic minority hill tribe peoples in many small villages results in lovely portraits. You can even go trekking and camping to places where you won't find any other tourists.



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan

HISTORY AND CULTURE

From the historic capital of Ayutthaya near Bangkok to the rich culture of the Lanna Kingdom to the north, you'll find plenty to photograph. Thais are proud that their kingdom was never colonized. They have a jagged history of conflict with their closest neighbors, but they have never submitted to a foreign power.

Evident history is not all old either. You can see influences of American military presence during the Vietnam war era, bringing Pattaya its seedy vibe. Evidence of opium farms in the Golden

Triangle don't date back too long. Modern history has shaped the current culture to a certain degree.

Everywhere you go in Thailand you'll witness the greatest cultural resonance. The Thai royal family are ingrained into the fabric of life here. Every home and business have at least one photo of the king hanging. Throughout the education system, agriculture, art, and everyday business, it's not hard to find the positive influence of the royal family.



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan



Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan

The late king, His Majesty, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, started Royal Projects in the north of Thailand. The king developed these projects to educate and support the hill tribe peoples. At the time, many of them were growing opium. The success of these projects means that these farmers are now prospering by growing other produce. This includes vegetables, fruit, and coffee crops. The royal project locations remain interesting places for photography.

Don't hesitate to visit a touristic hill tribe village. These are the best places to meet and photograph the ethnic minorities. You'll find it almost impossible to locate villages where people wear their traditional clothes and still live in bamboo homes. The tourist villages are the most convenient places for photographers. At these villages, you can capture portraits of these people. To learn more about this subject, [please read this article](#).

I was reluctant to take our workshops to a tourist village and started to only at the request of customers. We very much enjoy visiting [Baan Tong Luang](#), one such village near Chiang Mai. The key to successful portraits at any of these villages is the effort you make to interact with the people. They are warm-hearted, friendly people who love to be photographed. Reach out with a smile on your face and don't worry about the language or cultural barriers. I'm sure you'll take some great photographs.




Photograph by Kevin Landwer-Johan

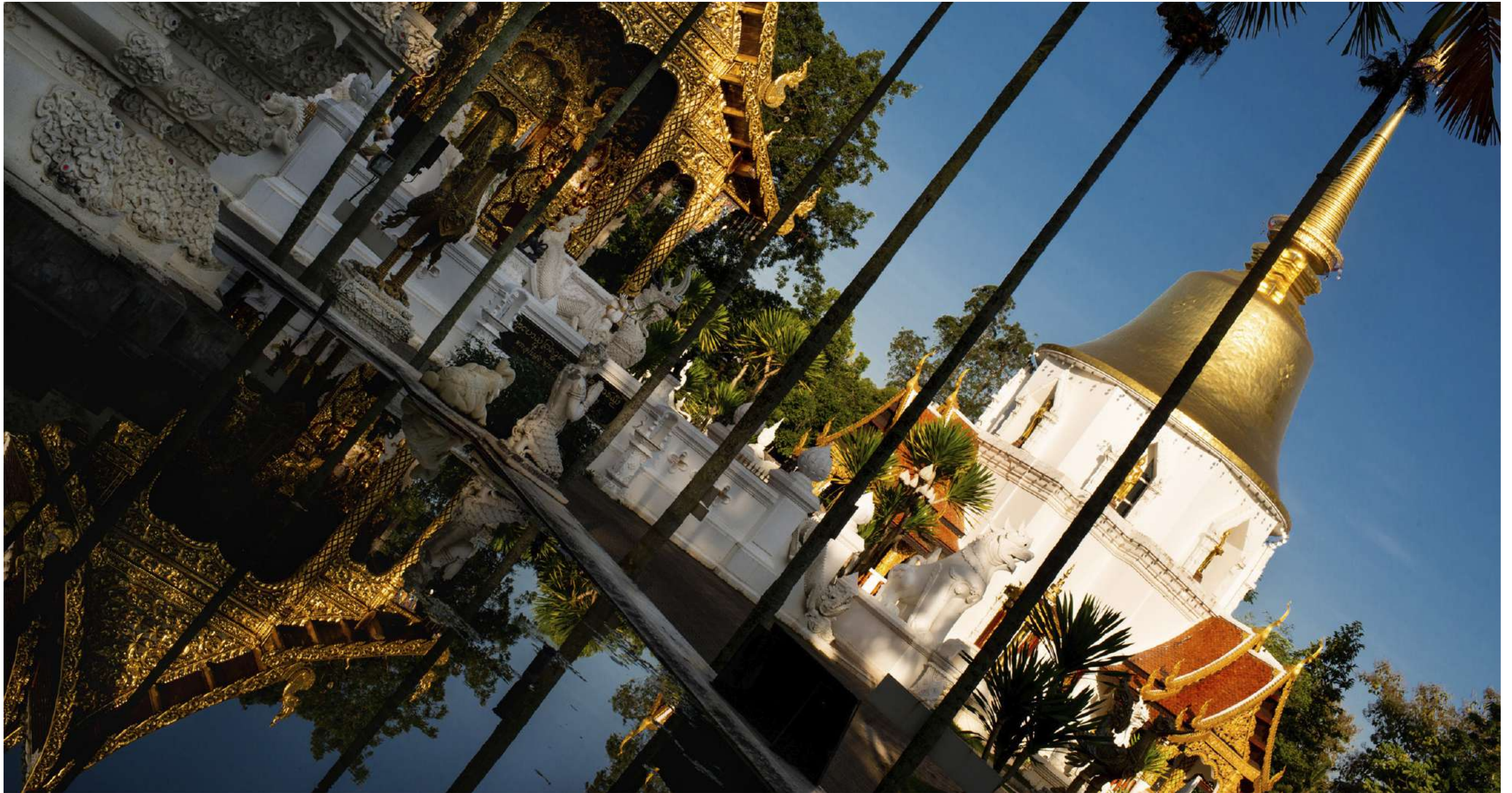
TOURS AND WORKSHOPS

Organized tours tend not to be so popular amongst photographers. None of us like being rushed on to the next location just as we are lining up a prize-winning photo. Most tours squeeze in the greatest number of locations. This is not conducive to good photography experiences.

Taking a photography workshop in Thailand, however, is a completely different experience. Chiang Mai Photo Workshops are designed to take you to some of the more special places in and around the city. You'll experience a mixture of down-to-earth local spots with highlights in only the best tourist destinations.

Taking a photography workshop, you'll find photo opportunities that you may miss when you're on your own. You'll also be guaranteed to learn more about photography, no matter what level you are currently at.

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CONCLUSION

Hopefully this guide has given you some idea about what to expect from your first photo adventure to Thailand. This country is so wonderfully diverse that you will find it difficult to put your camera down. I can't possibly delve into all the aspects of Thai life

you might want to photograph. I didn't even touch on the food, massages, meditation retreats, or exotic hotels - all of which you will most likely want to photograph too!



Hey there!

Let's get real for a minute... Learning photography can be super challenging! But we're here to help you every step of the way! Here are 3 of our most useful (*and FREE!*) photography resources:



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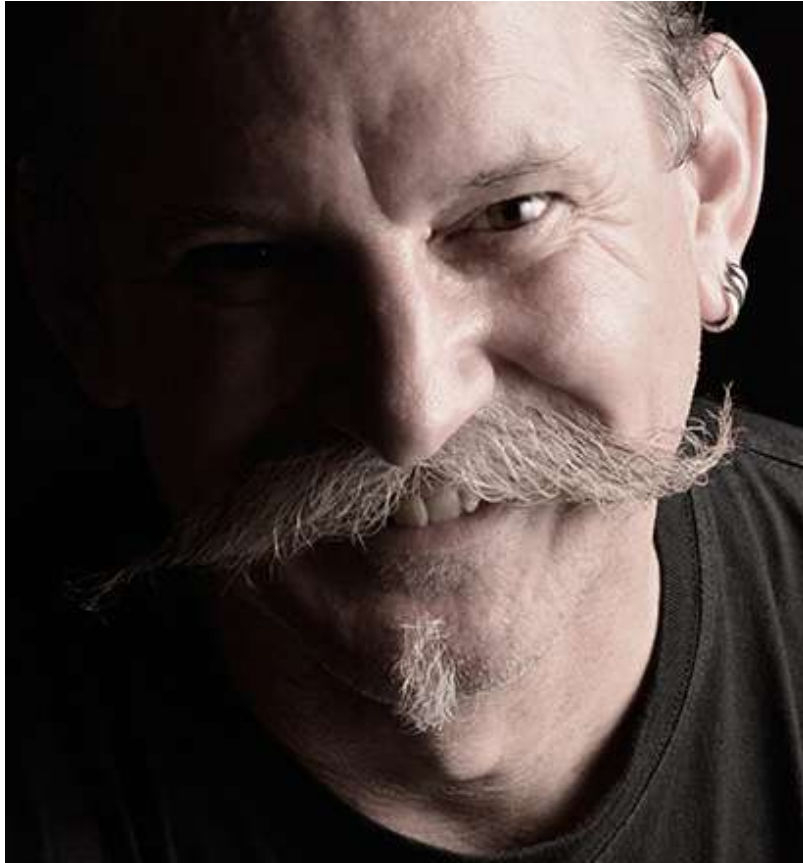
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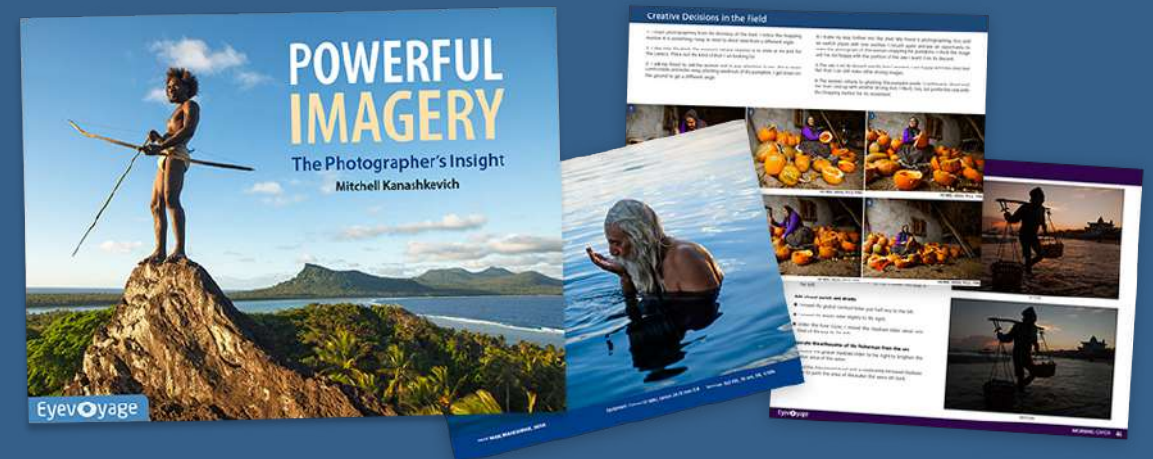
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kevin is a New Zealand professional photographer living in the north of Thailand since 2002. During his career he has worked in editorial, documentary and commercial photography. He now also teaches photography workshops and writes books and articles. You can read his blog [here](#). He moderates a growing [photography group on Facebook](#) and you can see some of his photos on [Instagram](#).

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