

"In Search of the Song of the Gibbon"

Itinerant Health Retreat in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh

December 17 to 22, 2019, Mae Hong Son, Thailand

Set in the magical highlands of northern Thailand, a journey to find the beautiful voice we are all looking for

The theme of this retreat is « Taking care of our body and mind » by practicing meditation, hiking, relaxation and following an appropriate diet and other to our health beneficial practices. The aim is to develop our awareness of the interdependence between the food we consume, our body, our mind and the environment we are living in. To preserve a healthy body and a clear mind, we will have light, vegetarian and organic meals. At the same time we are hiking to help our body to tap into accumulated reserves and to renew itself during the training facing the challenge. During the whole retreat, Thây Pháp Lu, a senior Dharma teacher of the Plum Village Monastery in France, will be our spiritual guide.

The rhythm of our journey will be marked by spiritual teachings, sitting meditation, walking meditation in plain nature and other practices. We will have a Dharma sharing each day, giving every participant the opportunity during this "itinerant and interior journey" to share with the group his inner state in the present moment.

Food and lodging will be provided by the inhabitants of the ethnic Karen villages passed on our trip (authentic home stay accommodation).

We will practice in the pure Plum Village tradition of our spiritual teacher Thich Nhat Hanh and all participants are invited to participate actively and observe the 5 Mindfulness Training.

Please visit our website www.suansompou.weebly.com to learn more about our activities and other Health Retreats during the winter season 2019-20. Information is presented in Thai and Chinese too.

As our host communities on the way have limited host capacity we **cannot accept more than 20 participants**.

Retreat program:

16 December, 17:30: welcome and logistic briefing in Mae Hong Son city

17 December, 06:00: start of the retreat in Mae Hong Son city

20 December: Day without hiking. Listening to the forest, being together, meeting villagers, workshops...

22 December, 17:30: back in Mae Hong Son city



Daily schedule:

05:00-07:00 Morning practice (prostrations, massage, sitting, Dharma Talk)

08:00-16:30 Hiking meditation, relaxation, eating meditation

18:00-19:30 Evening practice (sitting, dharma sharing, being together)



Participation criteria:

Participants have to be good walkers (level 4 to 5, see below), used to hiking and comfortable with 5-6 hours walks per day over a period of several consecutive days. The first two days and the last day will be rather easy, the other days a bit tougher. All participants will carry their own backpacks during the whole retreat.

This retreat will be held bilingual in English and French.

Cost of the retreat: **110 Euro**. This amount includes the support to the transportation costs of Thây Pháp Lu and any participating monastic of Thai Plum Village, accommodation by the local population (food and lodging), local transports and local guides from December 17-22.

Whoever is not yet member of the 'Som Pou Association' is invited to add an additional 30 Euro which does consist of its annual membership fee. Opportunities to practice dana/generosity will be given to the participants.

Registration by email (sanghasompou@pm.me) will open on 01 July 2019. No registration will be accepted before this date. Once accepted, your registration has to be validated by transferring the total participation cost and a proof of your payment, on which your participation will be confirmed.

This retreat is organized by Sangha Som Pou and is strictly non-profit oriented. Any possible 'profit' will be reserved for the construction of Suan Sompou (Sompou Gardens) our forthcoming Practice Center.



Necessary equipment:

- Backpack for the transport of your personal items as well as food and water for the day. We strongly suggest to adapt the weight of your backpack to your respective experience and possibilities. Everybody will carry his own backpack during the whole retreat. As a guideline, the weight of your backpack should not exceed 5 kg.
- Thermos or other bottle for the transport of your drinking water for the day.
- Comfortable walking shoes with good, gripping soles will do for this trail. Gore-tex or other water resistant coatings are not necessary. We will cross frequently small streams.
- Pullover (polar fleece or other) for chilly mornings. During the night, temperatures can drop to below 10°C. Daytime temperatures are around 25°C to 30°C during this period of the year.
- Rain and wind-stopper coat or poncho for the rainy days (extremely rare during this period).
- Sun hat against the subtropical sun.
- Head-or handheld torch.
- A sleeping bag is not necessary, blankets are provided by our local hosts. However consider a sleeping bag sheet.
- Nordic walking poles are obligatory for this retreat and can be rented from us.
- First aid kit including components to deal with minor casualties (cuts, scrapes, blisters, headaches ...)
- **Very important: good mood, patience and flexibility!**

NOTE: Couples are much invited however due to organizational issues cannot have their own private room.

Walking levels of our Health Retreats

Level 6: outstanding physical condition, familiar with long and difficult mountain treks.

Level 5: very good physical condition, regular sports practice (at least two to three times a week).

Level 4: good physical condition, fit for 5 to 6 hours walking per day in a field with significant height gain.

Level 3: correct physical condition, comfortable with 3 to 4 hours walks per day with moderate height gain.

Level 2: sufficient physical condition, able to walk 2 to 3 hours a day on flat ground.

Level 1: no particular physical condition, able to walk one hour per day on flat ground

Note: The aim of the retreats organized by the Sangha/Suan Som Pou is not to achieve a too high or a too small personal physical challenge. So we respectfully ask those who wish to participate in one or other of our retreats to take in account the indicated walking skill levels before registration. The organization team declines all liability concerning any form of physical problems that might occur during the retreat, and will not take in charge any repatriation costs to Mae Hong Son.



How to go to Mae Hong Son?

Wisdom Airlines and Bangkok Airways do provide a few flights per day to Chiang Mai. Nok Air (www.nokair.com) provides three times a week a direct flight from Bangkok.

If you are on a tight budget, you can get minivan transportation from Chiang Mai (250 Baht, every 30 minutes, last van leaves 14:30) or take a night bus from Bangkok by 'Sombat Tours'(www.sombattour.com). The buses are very comfortable and include food and non-alcoholic drinks (approx. 800 Baht).

You can take a local thai taxi ("tuk-tuk") to the hotel of your choice (count 50 to 60 Baht for the trip).

Suggestions concerning accommodation in Mae Hong Son before and after the retreat:

Piya Guesthouse: very nice location, very comfortable for a great price: 700 Baht double room per night

Friend House: very friendly and clean, double room 300 Bath

Little Good Things: outstanding vegan restaurant, not to be missed!

Some tips :

- When paying for air tickets by credit card, travel insurance is often included.
- For more information concerning your visit in Thailand, you will find all you need on the internet or in printed travel guides available in all good book shops.
- Don't forget to visit our marvelous regional practice center in Thailand (www.thaiplumvillage.org)

