Headline: Beaches, culture put Thailand atop bucket lists

Deckhead: Splendor, architecture and intrigue bless East Asian nation

Bucket list trips share many commonalities, but a more popular one might be distance. The farther the destination, the more likely it is to be on your list.

Europe, Australia, an African safari, China, Japan and Egypt quickly come to mind as once-in-a-lifetime visits. But they’re just a snapshot. Here’s an interesting one: Thailand.

Located in East Asia and boasting the appearance of a gerrymandered congressional district, Thailand rolls natural beauty into urban and historic hotspots. Beaches flourish, and cities rise. Culture reverberates, and adventure accentuates this multidimensional country.

Its history spans centuries and its culture is as exotic as it is friendly. Thailand embraces tourists with its white-sand beaches and bustling cities. Lush resorts populate its myriad shores to make your visit as relaxing as it is memorable.

It might not be easy to step away from Thailand’s beautiful beaches that snuggle with the Andaman Sea or the Gulf of Thailand. Light breezes carry the scent of salt water, putting a stamp on its tropical climate. Long-tail boats sail on calm, blue waters through gorgeous terrain. Perhaps a beach chair, umbrella and cocktail might seem to be all you need, but there is so much more.

City-dwellers will find sanctuary in Bangkok, Thailand’s capital city. It has more than 8.2 million residents and nearly as much to see and experience. See ancient temples, including Wat Arun. It’s 270-feet high, is covered from top to bottom with mosaics and is named for the Hindu god Aruna, God of Dawn. It’s glorious to behold at dawn or sunset.

Wat Pho – Temple of the Reclining Buddha – is a temple complex that houses the most Buddha’s in Thailand. Opulent statues, ornate pagodas and striking stonework spread throughout and tell the story of the local culture.

The Golden Palace once served as the residence of Thai kings, their royal courts and multiple branches of government. Witness fine art at the Bangkok Art & Culture Center. And don’t forget to satisfy your appetite. More than 300,000 street vendors serve stir fries, fried rice, curries, grilled meat and fish skewers.

Escape the commotion of Bangkok with a stop in Chiang Mai. Absorb the beauty of mountainous landscapes and historic temples, such as Wat Phra Singh and Wat Chedi Luang. Visit the Chiang Mai Night Bazaar and leave time to visit the Elephant Nature Park.

Thailand’s culture continues to permeate through the city of Ayutthaya. A UNESCO World Heritage-listed city, it’s populated with monasteries, temples, statues and archaeological ruins. Visit Bang Pa-In Palace, Wat Lokaya, Wat Phra Si Sanphet and Wat Chaiwatthanaram.

Had enough culture? Thailand is teeming with national parks, including Mu Ko Similan, Khao Sok and Khao Lak-Lam Ru. Scuba divers flock to spend hours admiring coral reefs and marine life. Limestone cliffs, awe-inspiring waterfalls and a lush evergreen forest will take your breath away. And a myriad of ecosystems and diverse flora and fauna will keep naturalists animated for hours.

Phang Nga is a Thai province on the coast of the Andaman Sea. Tourists descend upon it to visit Mu Ko Surin National Park, one of the best diving sites in Thailand. Explore by hiking or snorkeling and visit Ao Phang-Nga National Park to adventure into its stunning caves, emerald-green waters and the picturesque James Bond Island.

Cutline: ONE NIGHT IN BANGKOK – Temples light up in the foreground a of setting sun in Thailand’s capital city. Image: sahachat. Adobe Stock.