The Last Millionaire

Bangkok

BBC
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Bangkok City Guide

Bangkok is the sweltering capital of South East Asia. Built on hundreds of natural and artificial canals fanning out from the flood plains of the Chao Phraya river, the city is gradually sinking. Modern Bangkok is chaotic, grimy, and bumper to bumper with traffic and with no obvious centre, it’s a difficult city to navigate. But what Bangkok has, unlike other Asian capitals, is stunning architectural treasures – there’s grand palaces, glittering temple spires, and reclining gold Buddhas. And there are ready escapes from the over populated city into a longboat taxi and onto the shaded canal waterways.

Superb Thai cooking is available on every street in Bangkok, from street noodle stands to uber cool bars and restaurants. Bangkok’s infamous wild nightlife has been curbed since 2001 when a 1am curfew was placed by the government on most bars and clubs. But the city retains its vibrant nightlife – from the classic backpacker farang (western) Khao San Road, to the hiso (high society) hip bars on Royal City Avenue (RCA).

Bangkok became Thailand’s capital just over 200 years ago. Over the last 4 decades the breakneck speed of modern development meant the city planners couldn’t keep up. It’s a sprawling metropolis and has far too few roads for the constantly growing numbers of cars. With no grid system, streets fan out in a spiders web sprawl and can change their name 4 times along their length. There’s a growing population of 9 million in a city that’s very short on space. In the last few years the daily battle through the traffic has improved with a new skytrain – an elevated monorail which provides a fast, efficient way to criss-cross the city - and in 2004 the first 18 lines of the subway came into operation.

Thai for Bangkok is Krung Thep – which translates as “city of angels”. Thais deal with their chaotic city with jai yen – “a cool heart” - and mai pen rai – “no problem”. Crucially important is sanuk – fun – if something isn’t fun it isn’t worth doing. 90% of the population are Buddhists and running alongside Buddhism is an older belief in animism – that trees and other objects are spirits which must be placated to avoid bringing harm. In Bangkok each building has a “spirit house” to honour the spirits ousted by the buildings construction. These shrines can be seen all over the city and are taken very seriously with incense and flowers placed in the spirit house each day.
History

400 years ago Bangkok was a tiny village. By 1650 it had become a port and customs post for tall ships carrying cargo from all over the world. Thailand’s original capital was Ayutthaya but after the city was ransacked by the Burmese King Rami 1 made Bangkok the capital in 1782. He built the Grand Royal Palace and monasteries in the area of Ratanakosin – which remains Bangkok’s spiritual heart today. The city was almost all built up on stilts and moored on bamboo rafts on the rivers and canals, with only temples and palaces on dry land. The first king to be credited with modernising Bangkok was King Mongkut (1851-68). He made trade and diplomatic links with Western countries and financed the first paved streets. His son King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) continued the modernisation building a railway, tram and more roads. During this time grand European style boulevards and buildings were built – which can still be seen on Ratchadamnern Ave.

In 1932 a coup overthrew the monarchy and the royal family was sidelined to a position of symbolic significance. Free elections were run in 1938 and on a tide of nationalistic feeling the country’s name was changed from Siam to Thailand in 1939. It was felt that the old name symbolized links with foreign powers whilst the new name told the world the country belonged to the Thais.

By the 50s many of the Bangkok’s canals had been filled in and concreted over. The 50 and 60s saw the first big construction boom in the city when huge investment was made in Thailand by the Americans. China had succumbed to communism and the Americans were keen to influence the Thais. In 1968, during the Vietnam War the US had a huge military contingent based in Thailand, and used the country as a base for US bombing raids against Vietnam and Laos. The following decades saw a seesawing government between civil and military rule, with political turmoil, demonstrations, riots and coups, amid widespread government corruption. Despite this the early 90s were a time of continued economic growth and Bangkok witnessed another wave of construction with skyscrapers added to the skyline at a furious rate.

The 2001 election was won by the Thai Rak Thai party (Thai loves Thai) led by one of Thailand’s richest men – the telecom tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra. The new prime minister brought in laws as part of a “social order campaign” to curb Bangkok’s notorious nightlife, underage drinking and drugs. Thaksin ordered a
a curfew requiring bars and clubs to close at 2am in “entertainment zones” and 1am elsewhere. Thaksin was involved in various corruption scandals during his premiership and eventually ousted by a peaceful military coup in September 2006.

1782
Rami 1 becomes King. He moves the capital of Thailand from Ayutthaya to Bangkok.

1851-68
King Mongkut comes to power. Reforms the law, courts relationships with the West and sets Siam on a modernisation path.

1893-1910
Siam is forced to give up border territories to the French and British empires.

1939-45
Philbul Songkhram becomes Siam’s first prime minister and changes the country’s name to Thailand. The Japanese occupy Thailand during WWII.

1950-1970
The 50s is a time of political turmoil, seesawing government between civil and military rule. In the 60s American backed investment generates economic boom. During the Vietnam War the Americans establish army bases in the country.

1995-97
Two corrupt governments mismanage the economy. The Thai baht is devalued in July 1997 and Thailand enters a recession.

2001
Improvement in the economy and Thaksin Shinawatra of the TRT party is elected Prime Minister.

2006
PM Thaksin is ousted by a peaceful military coup in September.
Neighbourhood Districts

Old Town and China Town
This district has a waterfront onto the Chao Praya river – choppy, brown in colour and clogged with ferries, pleasure cruisers and river taxis. Many of Bangkok’s five star hotels line the river. This is the area for Bangkok’s big tourist sights – The Royal Grand Palace and the temple Wat Pho.

China Town is full of long dark alleys lined with ancient wooden Chinese architecture, markets and noodle vendors. To the north of the district is the famed Khao San Road – a narrow street lined with shops, and bars, once the exclusive preserve of backpackers, now young Thais party here.

Sukhumvit
Rather than a district this is a single road – Sukhumvit – which goes on for miles. Off the road are numbered side roads – which are called sois – eg soi 1, soi 2 etc – with the numbers going up to the 100s. Some of the sois are tiny and others mini neighbourhoods in their own right. The skytrain runs along the length of the street bringing customers to the hot nightlife spots.

Siam
Shopping and youth-culture hub. This is the location of super-malls like Central World and Siam Paragon, Western fast food joints and a hub of language student activity with dozens of English language schools. The British Council is located here too.

Silom and Sathorn
Home to both the notorious Patpong with its “love you long” go-go girl bars and the pedestrianised Thanon Silom – where the gay bars and ladyboy shows are. Also here is the skyscraper financial district.

Royal City Avenue
This avenue is also known as RCA. Once it was a student ghetto but now as one of the designated Entertainment zones with a closing time of 2am its become nightlife central. The hangout for affluent Thai youth who travel the pedestrianised long strip of clubs and bars with supremely loud music blaring out.
Chatuchak
The famous Chatuchak Weekend Market – also known as JJ is located here. The district landmark is the Elephant Tower – an office block which has been designed in a graphic elephant shape.
The Big Sights

The Royal Grand Palace
This is the must see in Bangkok and Thailand’s holiest landmark. Once a royal residence but now only used for ceremonial occasions. You enter the palace gates onto a driveway with views of the temple’s glittering spires. The perfectly preserved grounds are highly decorated with tiles and ceramics. The building dates from 1782 the year Bangkok was founded as the capital of Thailand. The palace complex houses Wat Phra Kaeo, the holiest of all Thai temples, where the sacred Emerald Buddha rests, although rather emeralds it is covered in jade. There is a strict dress code and visitors wearing shorts, mini-skirts, sleeveless shirts or flip-flops will be refused entry, although it is possible to hire trousers and plastic shoes.

Na Phra Lan Road
Tel: 0 2222 8181/ 02623 5500
www.palaces.thai.net
Opening: Daily 0830-1530
Admission: charge

Vimanmek Palace
Vimanmek Palace is the world’s largest building made entirely from golden teak. This colonial style mansion was built for King Rama V in 1868 and constructed entirely without nails. The palace was originally on the island of Ko Si Chang and used as a royal summer retreat, but was dismantled and rebuilt in Bangkok in 1900. The 81-room mansion stands in carefully manicured lawns, located close to the current royal residence, and contains 31 exhibition rooms. It has magnificent huge staircases, octagonal rooms and lattice walls. It also houses Thailand’s first indoor bathroom and the oldest typewriter with Thai characters. Visitors are not free to wander but must take a guided tour, which take place every 30 minutes. The dress code is the same as for the Royal Grand Palace.

Ratchawithi Road
Tel: 02 6 28 6300
www.palaces.thai.net
Opening: Daily 0930-1600
Admission: charge (included with ticket to the Royal Grand Palace).
Wat Pho (Temple of the reclining Buddha)
Wat Pho is the oldest and largest temple in Bangkok and houses an enormous gold-plated reclining buddha, which is 46m (150ft) long and 15m (49ft) high. Today, the temple is renowned for its teaching of herbal medicine and traditional massage. There is a strict dress code.

Th Sanam Chai
Tel: 02221 5910/0 2226 0335
www.watpho.com
Opening: Daily 0800-1800
Admission: charge

National Museum
The largest and most comprehensive museum in Thailand, the National Museum houses a vast collection of artefacts and covers a broad range of subjects from antiquities to religious sculpture. The building, begun in 1782, is fascinating in its own right, having been built in traditional Thai style. The museum is so large that it needs more than one visit to do it justice. A highlight is the lovely teak pavilion, which houses personal royal belongings. Free guided tours in English are given by volunteers at 0930 on Wednesdays and Thursdays and are highly recommended.

Th Na Phra That
Tel: 0 2224 1333.
www.thailandmuseum.com
Opening: Wed-Sun 0900-1600.
Admission: charge

Jim Thompson Thai House
Jim Thompson was an American who came to Bangkok after World War II and the Jim Thompson Thai House was his home until he mysteriously disappeared in Malaysia in 1967. He completely revived the Thai silk industry and his house, traditionally Thai in style, is now a museum showing his collection of Asian artefacts. He was an avid collector of Thai things from residential architecture to Southeast Asian art. The house is a complex of six traditional Thai teak structures brought to Bangkok from various parts of Thailand and its construction was completed in 1955. The house can only be visited on a guided tour.

6 Soi Kasemsan 2 Song, Rama I Th
Tel: 0 2216 7368.
www.jimthompsonhouse.com
Opening: Daily 0900-1700 (last tour at 1630).
Admission: charge
Eating/drinking

As an international city Bangkok has food from across the globe but undoubtedly the superb Thai cuisine is the best on offer. There is a range of places to eat - from gourmet restaurants, side street noodle shops to night markets. No matter what time of day and night there will always be somewhere to eat and many Bangkokians eat 5 times a day. Eating out is so popular that many city residents either don’t have or don’t use their kitchen. Meals cost an average of between 40 -500B. Most dishes come with steamed rice or noodles. Instead of being served individual courses everything comes at once so the taste can complement each dish. Thai curries are extremely popular, coconut milk and red chillies are a staple ingredient. Lime is also a popular ingredient in dishes such as soup and salads. One of the simplest and immensely popular dishes in Bangkok is rice stir-fry containing a variety of meat - chicken, pork, beef or shrimp. Thai soups are served at almost all restaurants, lemon grass, lime peel and lime juice help give them a distinct sweet tang. Fruit is very popular in Bangkok with mango, lime, guava, watermelon and pineapple being available almost year round. Most are eaten fresh but some are dipped in a mixture of salt, sugar and ground chilli. Desserts are on the menu in about 75% of Thai restaurants and also sold by street vendors. Desserts include banana leaves filled with a mixture of anything from sticky rice, coconut, tapioca, mung beans and water chestnuts.

Ruen Mallika
This restaurant is set in an old teak house lined with antiques. The menu offers the fiery cooking of Southern Thailand. Servings are huge and many unusual dishes feature on the menu. There is a flower garden outside.

Ruen Mallika, 189 Sukhumvit Soi 22, in sub-soi to Soi 16
Tel: 02 663 3211
Opening:11am-11pm

May Kaidee
This simple neighbourhood restaurant serves some of the best vegetarian food available in Bangkok for a tiny price. The green curry with coconut and sticky black rice pudding are not to be missed. May Kaidee also offers vegetarian cooking lessons.

May Kaidee, 117/1 Thanon Tanao, Khao San
www.maykaidee.com
Tel: 089 137 3173
Greyhound Café
Minimalist style with hand written menus and white washed walls. The menu features Thai staples and local fusion dishes such as Spaghetti Pla Kem (stir-fried pasta with Thai anchovies, chilli and garlic).

Greyhound Café, 2nd floor, Sukhumvit Soi 24, Phrom Phong
Tel: 02 664 8663
Opening: 11am-10pm daily

Kai Thord Soi Polo
A Thai local favourite and very popular street stall. Famed for its fried chicken. Owner J-Kee has four decades of experience.

Kai Thord Soi Polo, 137/1-2 Soi Polo, Thanon Witthayu
Tel: 02 252 2252
Opening: 7am-10pm daily

Thang Long
Bangkok has restaurants representing the cuisines from all over Asia. Thang Long serves contemporary Vietnamese food in this split level restaurant. Housed in a 2nd floor loft with huge windows which overlook Lumphini Park. The clientele are Bangkok’s beautiful people. The fried lemongrass fish and pork in Good King Henry leaves is a top choice.

Thang Long, 82/5 Soi Lang Suan
Tel: 02 251 3504
Bars/Clubs

Bangkok’s infamous wild nightlife was curbed by Prime Minister Thaksin’s 2001 “social order campaign”. In an effort to clean up Bangkok’s act Thaksin introduced a 1am curfew on all bars and clubs. The exception is in the designated “entertainment zones” – where the closing time for clubs is extended to 2am.

Bangkok has 3 zones – the Patpong zone including the gay area of Silom, the Ratchadaphisek zone and the Phetchaburi zone which includes the RCA clubs. Although Sukhumvit doesn’t fall within an entertainment zone it is a very popular area for Thai teenagers to hang out – particularly around Thong Lor in the Ekkamai area.

Despite the clamp down Bangkok still has a vibrant nightlife. The Thais love to have sanuk (fun), and they love to drink. Karaoke is popular. There are bars everywhere from British and Irish pubs and to hiso cocktail bars. Almost all bars serve food. Bangkok has a team of “mixologists” called “Slow” who mix cocktails for club parties and events.

One popular way for Thais and expat locals to organise party events is online via official social networking groups. Almost every night of the week there will be an opening or party somewhere. These events are a mixture of business and pleasure.

The Khao San Road has a mixture of backpacker dens and pubs and more characterful bars. Once only “farang” (westerners) came here – but now Thai youth and students party here too. “Adult” go-go girl bars with their sex shows line the Patpong Streets in Silom. Patpong’s neighbours are the gay and ladyboy venues – which attract a mixed cosmopolitan crowd. The Upper Sukhumvit Road has a wide range of drinking holes – there are ex-pat pubs like The Bull’s Head, outdoor bars like Cheap Charlie’s and sophisticated destination bar/restaurants for wine and cocktails like the Bed Supperclub. Out in the suburbs Royal City Avenue (RCA) is nightlife central. This is the hangout for affluent Thai youth who travel the pedestrianised block after block of mega-clubs and bars with supremely loud music blaring out.

Saeng Som whisky - drunk as whisky-Coke, or mixed with Red Bull is a favourite. Popular beers include Singha, Chang and Kloster. Lychee martinis are also big. Alcohol is much more expensive than food, because of tax.

It’s essential to take photo ID (an original passport, not a photocopy) to the high end bars and clubs as they usually demand to see ID.
Bed Supperclub
Housed in a pod on stilts the stark white interior and industrial design have made this club a must see in Bangkok. You can eat med-asian fusion in the restaurant or dance the night away in the club.

Bed Supperclub, 26 Soi Sukhumvit 11
Tel: 02 651 3537

Gazebo
The new “it” club in town. Funky House, elctro, Tech, and progressive.

Gazebo, 1 Soi, Sukhumvit
Tel: 02 6652 475

Three Sixty & Zeta
You will find this flying saucer shaped bar on the 32nd floor of the Hilton Hotel. There is a fantastic panoramic view of Bangkok at night. It offers live jazz and cocktails.

Three Sixty & Zeta, 32nd floor, Millennium Hilton Bangkok Hotel, 123 Thanon Charoen Nakorn, Thonburi
Tel: 02 442 2000
Opening: 5pm-2am

The Cave
Not just a bar, this watering hole on Khao San Road also has an indoor climbing wall and sells climbing shoes and gear.

The Cave, Thanon Khao San

Tak Sura
This is one of the best bars for chilling out Thai Style. It’s decked out with old train benches and Chinese tea-house chairs. There’s a blurred smoky quality to the bar which attracts yuppie/student/artist types. Food served includes larb gai and Thai sausages.

Tak Sura, 499/2 Ratchawithi Soi 12, Soi Bot Xavier
Tel: 02 354 9286
Opening: Daily 5pm-1am

Bull’s Head
With a British tavern inspired interior the Bull’s Head offers draught beer, a jukebox, pub grub, a comedy club and quiz nights to its mostly British customers.

Bull’s Head, Soi 33/1, Th Sukhumvit
Tel: 02259 4444
Opening: 6pm-midnight
Arts/Entertainment

Music

Many of Istanbul’s live music venues are on the back streets which run off Istiklal Caddesi in Beyoglu.

There is a huge range of music genres and styles – from phiphat wong – a Thai classical orchestra, with its own Thai scale and instruments, to luuk thung – a Thai version of country and western. The Thais are great at taking music from the West and producing their own adapted variation.

Thailand has a thriving teen-pop industry – luuk grung or T-pop. Particularly popular are half-Thai, half-farang (Western) stars with Western names. Teen pop stars include Girly Berry who are like Girls Aloud and Zaza. The Thai Kylie is Tata Young. The big T-pop boy is Dome Prakornlum. Most T-pop stars are produced by the Thai equivalent of the X-Factor - a TV show called Acadamy Fantasia. Other big names who have a large pan-Asia fanbase include Bodyslam, Potato, and Clash and part British, part Thai electronica band Futon.

Siam Square is where to head to find Bangkok’s indie kid – dek naew scene. They hang out at the record stores and coffee shops of the area. There is an outdoor stage – in front of Central World mall which holds weekend concerts. Places to hear indie and rock include:-

Immortal Bar, first floor, Bayon Building, 249 Thanon Khao San. Tel: 081 750 0591. Open 1800 – 0130 daily. There is reggae Monday – Sundays; rock Tuesdays-Thursdays and Metal on Fridays. Any underground band is likely to turn up here at some point.

Lullabar, Mahannop Soi 1, Phra Nakorn. Tel: 08 6339 1390. Open 1700 – 0100 Tue Sunday. (no bands on a Sunday). A tiny room where Brit pop style rock, punk and indie bands play.


Popular with students who come to watch the indie/pop cover bands and the hip hop djs.

A good source of music gig info is www.bangkokgigguide.com.
The unique luuk thung – Thai country and western -has produced some huge stars. The biggest in recent times was a Thai Patsy Cline – Phomphuang Duangjian who tragically died aged 31 in 1992. Today's stars include a Thai Dolly Parton Jintara Poonlap and Siriporn Amphaipong. Places to catch luuk thung include;


Isaan Tawandaeng, 484 Thanon Pattanakarn. Tel: 02717 2320. Shows 2000-0030 daily. (This club has venues in other locations too).

The mega-star of pleng puer cheewit (songs for life) – a radical folk rock - is Ad Carabao, who is a household name in Thailand. Ad is a fifty something Willie Nelson type figure whose songs are Dylan influenced political and social protests. Pleng puer cheewit clubs look like a set from a Western movie with icons like wagon wheels, log walls and buffalo heads. Clubs include:

Raintree Pub and Restaurant, 116/64 Soi Rang Nam, Thanon Phayathai. Tel: 0 2245 7230. Shows 2030 – 0100 daily.

Saphaa Din, 888/2, Soi Sukhalumjiak, Thanon Sukhaphiban 1. Tel: 02943 8993

The Tawandang German Brewhouse is the place to hear all kinds of Thai music styles from luuk thung (country) to morlan (folk) to a phiphat wong (Thai classical orchestra). Run by an American musician this bar/club brews its own beer and puts on nightly variety shows that include dancing girls, shadow puppets, lady-boys and all kinds of Thai music.

Tawandang German Brewhouse, 462/61 Thanon Narathiwat Ratchanakharin. Tel 026 78 1114. open: 1630 – 0100 daily.

For a Western classical orchestra there is the Bangkok Symphony Orchestra, which performs at the Thai cultural centre and an opera company – Bangkok Opera, which stages performances at the Thailand Cultural Centre.

Thai Theatre/Dance
Classical Thai theatre is a dance-drama performance, based on age old themes such as good versus evil. There are lots of shows targeted at tourists and the spectacle of music, costume, drama and dance is sufficiently entertaining without needing to understand the intricacies of the plot.

Siam Niramit, Ratchada theatre, 19 Thanon Tiam Ruammit. Tel: 02 649 9222. A 2000 seat theatre which stages a history of Thailand’s culture for tourists in a spectacular of acrobatics, special effects, costumes and big chorus numbers.
Thailand Cultural Centre, Ratchadapisek. Tel: 02247 0028.
A performing arts centre which stages traditional and contemporary theatre, concerts and dance.

Thai dancing is performed for a religious ritual purpose several times a day at the Lak Muang Shrine near the Grand Palace and the Erawan Shrine. Both shrines have resident troupes of costumed dancers and musicians who are paid by worshippers to perform.

Thai Puppet Theatre
This art form was developed in the early 20th century and had almost died out until the late Sakorn Yangkeowsad – aka Joe Louis - revived it in 1985. Each foot tall stick puppet is controlled by 3 puppeteers. The puppets perform human-like graceful dance movements to a live orchestra.

Thai Puppet Theatre, Suan Lum Bazaar, Thanon Rama IV. Tel: 02 252 9683. Shows daily at 1930 and 2130.

Kathoey (ladyboy) Cabaret
Now world famous thanks to global tours – this is Thailand’s glamorous transvestite ladyboy cabaret. Each show is a spectacular, glitzy event with lip syncing performers doing big song and dance routines. Mambo and New Calypso Cabaret are highly professional commercial theatre shows. The drag shows at the gay bars around Thanon Silom like the Freeman club are racier.

Mambo, Washington Theatre, 496 Thanon Sukhumvit. Tel: 0 2259 5715/5128.

New Calypso Cabaret, first floor, Asia Hotel, 296 Thanon Phayathai. Tel: 0 2635 3960 or 0 2216 8937 after 6pm.

Freeman Club, between Soi 2 and Soi Thaniya, Thanon Silom. Tel: 0 2623 8032
Shopping/Fashion

Shopaholics in Bangkok can choose from glamorous malls or night time markets. There are plenty of fake designer bags and accessories as well as Thai textiles, art and antiques. Silk, gems and fashions are all good buys here. At the markets customers are expected to barter.

Downtown Bangkok is all about smart, multi-storeyed shopping malls like Central World and Siam Paragon. Here you will find fashion stores and big brands.

Mahboonkrong shopping centre, also known as MBK, is the favourite of Thai teens. It resembles more of a huge indoor market than shopping centre and is full of knock off goods. You can buy everything you want here from jeans to mobile phones, purses and make up.

One of Bangkok’s most famed and exhausting shopping experiences is the Chatuchak weekend market, also known as JJ. There are over 8000 open-air stalls offering everything from silk, designer lamps and Siamese kittens. You will find one-off clothing items, jewellery and ceramics. The market is split into 26 numbered sections according to genre.

Bangkok is an excellent place to have something tailor made - be it a shirt or suit or even a silk wedding dress. Textiles are much cheaper than in the UK so you can have a high quality garment made for a reasonably low cost. Golden Wool tailors can have something made for you in a matter of days – previous customers include royalty. A Song Tailor is renowned for being friendly and cheap so if you are on a budget this is the place to go.

The city has some of the country’s best gem and jewellery shops selling cut and uncut stones such as rubies, blue sapphires and diamonds. However there are many fake gems around so never buy from a tout. Check that the shop is a member of the Thai Gem and Jewellery Traders association. Most of the gem outlets are along Thanon Silom. Johnny’s Gems and Merlin et Delaunacy are among those reputable retailers.

**Siam Discovery Centre,** Cnr Th Phra Ram I & Th Phayathai
Opening: 10am-10pm daily

**Siam Paragon,** Th Phra Ram I
Tel: 02 658 3000
Mahboonkrong (MBK) Cnr Th Phra Ram I & Th Phayathai
Opening: 10am -10pm daily

Chatuchak Weekend Market, Th Phahonyothin
Opening: 8am-6pm Sat and Sun

Golden Wool, 1340-1342 Thanon Charoen Krung
Tel: 02 233 0149

A Song Tailor, 8 Trokk Chartered Bank, Off Thanon, near the Oriental Hotel
Tel: 02 630 9708

Johnny’s Gems, 199 Thanon Fuang Nakhon, near Wat Rajabophit In Ratanakosin

Merlin et Delauneway, 1 Soi Pradit, off Thanon Suriwong.
The two most popular sports in Bangkok are Thai Boxing or Muay Thai and Siamese football or Takraw.

**Thai Boxing**

Bangkok has two boxing stadiums, Lumphini stadium and Ratchadamnoen stadium. Tickets range from 1000b for 3rd class, 1500b for 2nd class and 2000b for ringside seats. As well as the boxing you can expect to be entertained by people betting on the bout even though gambling is prohibited. Make sure you buy your ticket from the stadium office not a tout.

**Lumphini Stadium, Thanon Rama IV, beside Suan Lum Night Bazaar, Pathumwan**
Tel: 08 9764 8203
Opening: Tue+Fri-6pm, Sat-5pm, 8.30pm

**Ratchadamnoen Stadium, 1 Thanon Ratchadamnoen Nok, Dusit**
Opening: Mon: 5pm, and 9pm, Wed + Thur-6pm, Sun-5pm

**Takraw**

Takraw is a cross between volleyball and football played with a rattan ball. Players stand in a circle and try and keep the ball in the air by kicking it. Points are scored for style, difficulty and a variety of kicking manoeuvres. You can often see games being played throughout the city on any available patches of land or in the Lumphini Park. Probably the best place to go to spectate is the National Stadium.

**Lumphini Park, Th Phra Ram IV**

**National Stadium, Th Phra Ram I,**
Tel: 02 214 0120

**Massage**

For leisure many people enjoy a Thai massage. Massages are much cheaper than in the UK and are part yoga, part pressure point and involve lots of kneading and pullemining. You will be left sore but revitalised. The quality of massage can differ depending where you go. The going rate is about 300B per hour. Buathip Thai Massage is a traditional looking massage parlour where you will definitely get value for money. The city also has several luxury spas like the Banyan Tree Spa.
Buathip Thai Massage, 4/13 Soi 5, Th Sukhumvit
Tel: 02 251 2627

Banyan Tree Hotel and Spa, 21/100 Th Sathon Tai
Tel: 02 679 10052

**Bowling**
Bangkok has 10 pin bowling in serious style at SF Strike Bowl. Located in the student's favourite mall - the MBK Centre - this bowling alley was designed by the same team behind the Bed Supperclub - Orbit - and is a white washed retro homage to minimalism. There are also karaoke pods, a DJ and a lounge.

SF Strike Bowl, 7th floor, MBK Centre, Thanon Phaya Thai. Tel: 02 611 4555

**Boat Trips**
A boat trip along the rivers and canals presents the city at its best. The longtail boat is a Bangkok icon and they can be chartered to tour the atmospheric scenic waters around Thonburi. Boats can be hired from the piers outside The Oriental Hotel, and the pier at the River City Shopping Centre. Prices are approximately B700 for 90 minutes. Another trip can be taken from the pier outside the Peninsula Hotel to Nonthabui. The trip travels along the Khlong Om canal past temples, fruit orchards and houses built on stilts. There are lots of restaurants on the way to stop off for a drink or lunch.

**Thai Cooking**
Many hotels and restaurants offer cookery courses in Thai cuisine, where you can learn to stir fry a Thai red or green curry or a yam – a hot and spicy salad. The most established is at the Oriental Thai Cooking School, close to the Oriental Hotel which runs a high quality hands on course teaching the different Thai cuisine styles. There are plenty of other options which include;

Blue Elephant Cooking School Tel: 0 2673 9353
Baipai Thai Cooking School Tel: 0 2294 9029
Thai House Tel : 0 2903 9611
**Oriental Cooking School** Tel: 0 2659 9000
Mai Kaidee – vegetarian cooking Tel: 089 137 3173
Media

The Bangkok Post and the Nation are the English language newspapers available in Bangkok. The Friday editions have listings. For a what’s-on magazine there is the daily X-Press. Some free listings mags - like BK and GuRu can be picked up from bars and restaurants. There is also a free monthly – Bangkok 101. Art Connection is a free monthly art based mag. Other monthlies available from news stands include Big Chilli – which is published by ex-pats and Thailand Tatler.

TV
There are 5 stations in Bangkok and two of these are commercial. Channels 3 and 7 feature programmes such as soaps and game shows. Channels 5, 9 and 11 are government controlled and show news, documentaries and very few entertainment shows. Thai music videos are broadcast 24 hrs a day on MTV Asia, and Channel V music channel.
Many hotels have satellite / cable which will show English channels such as the BBC and international movies and sport.

Radio
Radio is broadcast on FM and AM in Thai and English and plays mainstream music with news bulletins. English language stations include Eazy FM, 105.5FM, which offers easy listening and Virgin Hitz, 95.5FM which offers pop, dance and hits. Fat Radio (104.5) plays Thai indie sounds.
Practical Stuff

Passports

Passports need to be valid for at least 6 months on entry into Thailand.

Safety and Scams

There are various scams in Bangkok – one involves a tout telling you the place you want to visit is closed - and then they will try to take you somewhere else. Usually a gem shop where you would definitely be ripped off. Only buy gems from a reputable shop. Many tuk-tuk drivers work on commission from shops or bars so will try to take you there rather than where you want to go, and again may tell you the sight you wish to visit is closed. Try and avoid any parked tuk-tuks and taxis and instead flag one down and be firm about where you want to go. Opting for metered taxis will avoid the risk completely.

Some people pose as tourist guides with fake ids and offer to take you around the sights, they may also offer to take you to their home. They are usually the first part of a scam chain so stay well away.

Local Laws and Customs

• Never become involved with drugs of any kind in Thailand, possession of even very small quantities can lead to imprisonment.

• By law, tourists are expected to carry their passports with them at all times. There have been incidents where tourists have been arrested because they were unable to produce their passport.

• It is a criminal offence to make critical or defamatory comments about the King or other members of the royal family. There is huge respect for the royal family. (The Queen’s sister died earlier this year and this is still a sensitive topic).

• Dress modestly if visiting a religious shrine or temple, shoes should be removed and shoulders and knees must be covered.

• Thais don’t normally shake hands when they greet one another, but instead press the palms together in a prayer-like gesture called a wai.

• Thais regard the head as the highest part of the body, literally and figuratively. Therefore, avoid touching people on the head and try not to point your feet at people or an object. It is considered very rude. Shoes should be removed when entering a private Thai home.
• Do not buy from touts or unauthorised people who offer their services as guides.

**Tipping**

Tipping is not normal practice in Bangkok, although it is common practice in expensive hotels and restaurants. The exception is loose change left from a largish bill; it's not so much a tip as a way of saying 'I'm not so money-grabbing as to shovel up every last baht'.

**Currency**

Thailand’s currency is the Baht
Symbol.

1 Great British pound = 65.67 Thai Baht
5 Great British pound = 328.37 Thai Baht
10 Great British pound = 656.73 Thai Baht

1 Thai Baht = 0.01 GBP
5 Thai Baht = 0.07 GBP
10 Thai Baht = 0.15 GBP

Baht notes come in denominations of 20 (green), 50 (blue), 100 (red), 500 (purple) and 1000 (beige). There are 100 satang in one baht; coins include 25-satang and 50-satang pieces.

**Sample price guide**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottle of water</td>
<td>b 10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowl of noodles</td>
<td>b 30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky train ticket</td>
<td>b 15.00-45.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chao Phraya River Express Boat</td>
<td>b 9.00-20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Singha beer</td>
<td>b 90.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Thai massage, two hours</td>
<td>b 300.00-350.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Local Information**

TIME: GMT + 7 hour
(6 hours ahead of the UK in the summer)

Sunrise + Sunset
Mid July: Sunrise – 05:56, Sunset - 18:50

**Weather**

Bangkok has a tropical climate so it’s warm and humid throughout the year. From June through to September it’s around 24-28 C. This is the rainy season and there can be lots of it. However, this can be quite refreshing.
Dialling codes

The international country dialling code from the UK to Thailand is +66 and the Bangkok city code is +2.

The outgoing international code dialling out of Bangkok is 001, followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 001 44 for the United Kingdom).

All Bangkok numbers start with 02. Dialling within Bangkok from a landline or a mobile is exactly the same – dial the entire number which starts with 02.

Electricity

Electrical current is 220 volts, 50Hz. Most sockets take the round 2 pin adapters however some take flat two pin ones.

Business hours
Banks: 9:30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri
Offices: 8.30am-4.30pm
Shops: 10am-7pm-this can vary on the size of shop

Public Transport

• Traffic is a huge problem in Bangkok. If you can - avoid the traffic and travel by river, canal or Skytrain.

• Bus services are frequent but frantic, and quite confusing to use. They also get stuck in the traffic.

• River taxis are cheap, convenient and work a regular route along the Mae Nam Chao Phraya. The Chao Phraya River Express operates between Tha Wat Ratchasingkhon in south central Bangkok northwards to Nonthaburi Province. There are express lines which stop at certain piers during set morning and evening hours and a local line which stops at all piers from 06:00 to 19:40. Bangkok Metropolitan Authority operates the Khlong Saen Saeb route through central Bangkok. This route is useful for travellers pressed for time as it provides traffic-less trip between Siam Square and Banglamphu.

• The BTS Skytrain is Bangkok’s elevated rail system, providing clean, user-friendly rail travel with great views in the bargain. It is extremely efficient and relatively cheap. Trains run frequently along two lines from 06:00 to 24:00 and are labelled with their final destination.
• The city’s first-ever 18 station subway opened in 2004, linking Hualamphong Railway Station with Bang Seu in the north via the Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre. The line intersects Skytrain routes near the Asoke Skytrain station, Silom Skytrain station, and also at the Mo Chit Skytrain station. Metro trains operate from 05:00 to 24:00 and vary in cost according to distance.

Taxis

Bangkok taxis almost all use their metres and most have air-con. The passenger is expected to pay the toll fare if any are crossed. Occasionally at peak times taxis or taxi changeover time (eg 3.30pm) taxis may refuse to take you on certain routes because of traffic. If this is the case just try another.

If possible flag a taxi down rather than getting into one waiting at the kerb, who is most likely to be on commission to a bar or club. Look for taxis with signs on top reading 'Taxi Meter' as these are always cheaper than non-metered taxis.

The starting charge of a taxi is 35b for the first 2km, then 4.50b per kilometre for the next 10km, 5b per kilometre for 13km to 20km and 5.50b per kilometre for any distance greater than 20km.

It is possible to hire a taxi all day for 1500b to 2000b depending on how much driving is involved.

Tuk-Tuk’s are small three wheel vehicles which are cheap but only recommended for small journeys. Make sure you agree on a fixed fare if you take a tuk-tuk, about 40b – 80b for a short journey is a fair price. Beware of any tuk tuk drivers who offer to take you sightseeing, their purpose will be to take you to a shady gem or tailor shop to earn commission.

Motorcycle taxis are used for short journeys. They are fast and cost 10-30b – but not recommended for the faint-hearted.
## Useful Words and Phrases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>as in dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aa</td>
<td>as it looks with an elongated sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ae</td>
<td>as in there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ai</td>
<td>as in buy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ao</td>
<td>as in now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aw</td>
<td>as in awe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>as in pen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>as in rip and I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kh</td>
<td>as in keep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ph</td>
<td>as in put</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>th</td>
<td>as in time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eu</td>
<td>as in sir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>as in tip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii</td>
<td>as in feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o</td>
<td>as in knock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oe</td>
<td>as in hurt, but more closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>as in loot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uay</td>
<td>u and then ay as in pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uu</td>
<td>as in pool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>unvoiced and closer to g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>unvoiced and closer to b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>unvoiced and closer to d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To add politeness/ please to a sentence add krup for a man and ka for a women. There is no word for please as this is either included in the verb or by adding krup or ka.

M = masculine; f = feminine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Thai</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hello</td>
<td>Sa-wad-dee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you?</td>
<td>Bpen yung ngai-bahng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m fine, thanks.</td>
<td>Sa-bai dee krup ka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s your name?</td>
<td>Khun cheu aria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My name is…</td>
<td>Phom cheu (m) di-chan cheu (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are you from?</td>
<td>Koon-Ma-jak-ni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodbye</td>
<td>Sa –wad-dee (formal) or bye-bye (informal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Khrap / kha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Mai chai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please</td>
<td>Krup (m)/ ka (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t understand</td>
<td>Mai khao jai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please speak more slowly</td>
<td>Poot chaa chaa dai mai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please write it down for me</td>
<td>Choo-ay kee-un noy, dai ma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you speak English?</td>
<td>Khun phuut phasaa angkrit dai mai?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse me</td>
<td>Khun khrap / khun kha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much/many?</td>
<td>Ra ka thao rai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Khmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorry</td>
<td>Khor thod krup/ka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you</td>
<td>Khawp khun, khawp khun maak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Its an emergency!</td>
<td>Chuk choen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please help me</td>
<td>Chuay phom / diichan dai mai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire!</td>
<td>fai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police!</td>
<td>Tam ruat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please can I have a receipt</td>
<td>Khor bai set duay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zero</td>
<td>Soon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one</td>
<td>Neung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Sorng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Sahm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>See</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Hah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Hok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>Jet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>Bpairt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine</td>
<td>Gao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>Sip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleven</td>
<td>Sip et</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelve</td>
<td>Sip song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty</td>
<td>Yee sip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One hundred</td>
<td>Neung roi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>