

Welcome to Bangkok

Same same, but different. This Thai T-shirt philosophy sums up Bangkok, a city where the familiar and the exotic collide like the flavours on a plate of pàt tai.

Full-on Food

Until you've eaten on a Bangkok street, your noodles mingling with your sweat amid a cloud of exhaust fumes, you haven't actually eaten Thai food. It can be an overwhelming mix: the underlying flavours – spicy, sour, sweet and salty – aren't exactly meat and potatoes. But for adventurous foodies who don't need white tablecloths, there's probably no better dining destination in the world. And with immigration bringing every regional Thai and international cuisine to the capital, it's also a truly diverse experience.

Fun Folks

The language barrier may seem huge, but it's never prevented anybody from loving the Thai people. The capital's cultural underpinnings are evident in virtually all facets of everyday life, and most enjoyably through its residents' sense of *sà-nùk* (fun). In Bangkok, anything worth doing should have an element of *sà-nùk*. Ordering food, changing money and haggling at markets will usually involve a sense of playfulness – a dash of flirtation, perhaps, and a smile. It's a language that doesn't require words, and one that's easy to learn.

Urban Exploration

With so much of life conducted on the street, there are few cities in the world that reward exploration as handsomely as Bangkok. Cap off an extended boat trip with a visit to a hidden market. A stroll off Banglamphu's beaten track can wind up in a conversation with a monk. Get lost in the tiny lanes of Chinatown and stumble upon a live Chinese opera performance. After dark, let the BTS (Skytrain) escort you to Sukhumvit, where the local nightlife scene reveals a sophisticated and dynamic city.

Contrasts

It's the contradictions that give the City of Angels its rich, multifaceted personality. Here climate-controlled megamalls sit beside 200-year-old village homes; gold-spired Buddhist temples share space with neon-lit strips of sleaze; slow-moving rivers of traffic are bypassed by long-tail boats plying the royal river; and streets lined with food carts are overlooked by restaurants on top of skyscrapers serving exotic cocktails. As Bangkok races towards the future, these contrasts will never stop supplying the city with its never-ending Thai-ness.



Why I Love Bangkok

By Austin Bush, Author

Admittedly, there are some things – the hot weather, the pollution, the political instability – that make Bangkok a less-than-ideal city. But there's so much more that makes it amazing. I love the food. What other city has such a full-flavoured, no-holds-barred, insatiable, fanatical approach to eating? I love old Bangkok. Districts such as Banglamphu and Chinatown still carry the grit and character of the city that used to be. And I'd be lying if I didn't also say that I love new Bangkok – don't we all have a soft spot for megamalls and air-con?

For more about our author, see p272.