



Bangkok & Around

Includes →

Sights	55
Activities.....	87
Courses	93
Tours.....	94
Festivals & Events	98
Sleeping.....	98
Eating	112
Drinking & Nightlife ...	121
Entertainment.....	126
Shopping	130
Around Bangkok	148

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ nahm (p116)
- ➔ Krua Apsorn (p113)
- ➔ Street food in Chinatown (p117)
- ➔ Eat Me (p115)
- ➔ Jay Fai (p114)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Siam Heritage (p105)
- ➔ AriyasomVilla (p109)
- ➔ Metropolitan by COMO (p106)
- ➔ Bangkok Tree House (p111)
- ➔ Lamphu Treehouse (p100)

Why Go?

Formerly the epitome of the elderly Asian metropolis, in recent years Bangkok has gone under the knife and emerged as a rejuvenated starlet. Her wrinkles haven't totally been erased, but you might not notice them behind the ever-expanding public-transport system, air-conditioned megamalls and international-standard restaurants.

But don't take this to mean that there's no more 'real' Bangkok. The Grand Palace and Wat Phra Kaew still sparkle just as they did more than 200 years ago, and the BTS (Skytrain) has had little impact on the shophouses of Banglamphu or the canals of Thonburi.

To really experience the Bangkok of today, it's necessary to explore both of these worlds. Take the MRT (metro) to hectic Chinatown, or the *klorn*g (canal, also spelt *khl*ong) boat to the chic CentralWorld mall, and along the way we're certain you'll find that the old personality and the new face culminate in one sexy broad indeed.

When to Go

- ➔ Bangkok is rated by the World Meteorological Organisation as one of the world's hottest cities. There's little fluctuation in the temperature, and the average high sways between a torrid 32°C and a sweltering 34°C.
- ➔ The rainy season runs approximately May to October, when the city receives as much as 300mm of rain monthly.
- ➔ Virtually the only break from this relentless heat and humidity comes during winter, a few weeks of relative coolness in December/January.

History

Now the centre of government and culture in Thailand, Bangkok was a historical miracle during a time of turmoil. Following the fall of Ayuthaya in 1767, the kingdom fractured into competing forces, from which General Taksin emerged as a decisive unifier. He established his base in Thonburi, on the western bank of Mae Nam Chao Phraya (Chao Phraya River), a convenient location for sea trade from the Gulf of Thailand. Taksin proved more of a military strategist than a popular ruler. He was later deposed by another important military general, Chao Phraya Chakri, who in 1782 moved the capital across the river to a more defensible location in anticipation of a Burmese attack. The succession of his son in 1809 established the present-day royal dynasty, and Chao Phraya Chakri is referred to as Rama I.

Court officials envisioned the new capital as a resurrected Ayuthaya, complete with an island district (Ko Ratanakosin) carved out of the swampland and cradling the royal court (the Grand Palace) and a temple to the auspicious Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Kaew). The emerging city, which was encircled by a thick wall, was filled with stilt and floating houses ideally adapted to seasonal flooding.

Modernity came to the capital in the late 19th century as European aesthetics and technologies filtered east. During the reigns of Rama IV (King Mongkut; r 1851–68) and Rama V (King Chulalongkorn; r 1868–1910), Bangkok received its first paved road (Th Charoen Krung, formerly known as New Road) and a new royal district (Dusit) styled after European palaces.

Bangkok was still a gangly town when soldiers from the American war in Vietnam came to rest and relax in the city's go-go bars and brothels. It wasn't until the boom years of the 1980s and 1990s that Bangkok exploded into a fully fledged metropolis crowded with hulking skyscrapers and an endless spill of concrete that gobbled up rice paddies and green space. The city's extravagant tastes were soon tamed by the 1997 economic meltdown, the effects of which can still be seen in the numerous half-built skyscrapers. Nearly two decades later, many of these still exist, but are becoming increasingly obscured behind a modern public transport system and the seemingly endless high-rise condos and vast glass-fronted mega-malls that have come to define the Bangkok of today.

Sights

Ko Ratanakosin เกาะรัตนโกสินทร์

Welcome to Bangkok's birthplace. The vast city we know today emerged from Ko Ratanakosin, a tiny virtual island ('Ko') made by dredging a canal around Mae Nam Chao Phraya during the late 18th century. Within this area you'll find the glittering temples and palaces that most visitors associate with the city. Ko Ratanakosin's riverfront setting is also home to several museums, markets and universities. All these sights are within walking distance of each other and are best visited early in the morning before the day comes to a boil.

The river ferry pier at Tha Chang is the most convenient access point.

★ Wat Phra Kaew & Grand Palace

Buddhist temple, historical site
(วัดพระแก้ว, พระบรมมหาราชวัง; Map p62; Th Na Phra Lan; admission 500B; ☀ 8.30am–4pm; 🚶 Tha Chang) Also known as the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, **Wat Phra Kaew** is the colloquial name of the vast, fairy-tale compound that also includes the former residence of the Thai monarch, the Grand Palace.

This ground was consecrated in 1782, the first year of Bangkok rule, and is today Bangkok's biggest tourist attraction and a pilgrimage destination for devout Buddhists and nationalists. The 94.5-hectare grounds encompass more than 100 buildings that represent 200 years of royal history and architectural experimentation.

Housed in a fantastically decorated *bòht* (chapel), the **Emerald Buddha** is the temple's primary attraction. For more on this and other highlights of the temple compound, see p60.

Except for an anteroom here and there, the buildings of the **Grand Palace** are now put to use by the king only for certain ceremonial occasions, such as Coronation Day.

Borombhiman Hall, a French-inspired structure that served as a residence for Rama VI, is occasionally used to house visiting foreign dignitaries. The building to the west is **Amarindra Hall** (open from Monday to Friday), originally a hall of justice but used today for coronation ceremonies.

The largest of the palace buildings is the **Chakri Mahaprasat**, the Grand Palace Hall. Thai kings housed their huge harems in the inner palace area, which was guarded by combat-trained female sentries.