



Bangkok

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Ariyasom Villa (p81)
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Why Go?

If all you want to do is kick back on a beach, Bangkok might seem like a transit burden full of concrete towers instead of palm trees. But it's shockingly easy to succumb to Bangkok's conveniences, sophistication and fast pace.

This big, crowded, polluted and seemingly chaotic Asian megacity is many things to many people, but no one calls it boring. For the visitor, the impact is immediate. Everywhere you look the streets and waterways are alive with commuters. School kids run untroubled by the heat, smiling vendors create mouth-watering food in push-away kitchens, and monks rub bare shoulders with businessmen in air-conditioned malls. Throw in Bangkok's unique mix of the historic and contemporary, dangerously appealing shopping and some of the most delicious and best-value eating on earth, and we're certain that you'll find the City of Angels more than just a transit hub.

When to Go

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



Bangkok Highlights

- 1 Basking in the glow of all that gold at **Wat Phra Kaew & Grand Palace** (p57).
- 2 Taking in the immense Buddha statue at **Wat Pho** (p57).
- 3 Skipping between sightseeing spots on a cruise of **Thonburi's canals** (p57).
- 4 Encountering the best of Thai architecture and artwork at **Jim Thompson House** (p66).
- 5 Burning baht at **Chatuchak Weekend Market** (p93).
- 6 Learning to make authentic Thai dishes at one of Bangkok's cooking schools, such as **Amita Thai Cooking Class** (p69).

- 7 Toasting the stars and the twinkling skyscraper lights at **Moon Bar** (p91) or one of the city's other rooftop bars.
- 8 Being blissfully pounded into submission at one of Bangkok's terrific-value Thai massage centres, such as **Health Land** (p69).

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