



Bangkok

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Best Places to Eat

- nahm (p80)
- Krua Apsorn (p78)
- Eat Me (p80)
- Jay Fai (p79)

Best Places to Stay

- Siam Heritage (p75)
- AriyasomVilla (p77)
- Metropolitan by COMO (p76)
- Bangkok Tree House (p77)
- Lamphu Treehouse (p72)
- Loy La Long (p74)

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 without sweating, 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 junction.

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.

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 they 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

Thailand's islands and beaches are not particularly well stocked with traditional Thai 'sights', so it's well worth taking in a few while you're in Bangkok.

Keep in mind that Thai temples are sacred places, and visitors should dress and behave

BANGKOK IN...

One Day

Get up as early as you can and take the **Chao Phraya Express Boat** (p71) to Tha Chang to explore the museums and temples of **Ko Ratanakosin** (p54), followed by lunch in **Banglamphu** (p78). After freshening up, gain a new perspective on Bangkok with sunset cocktails at one of the city's **rooftop bars** (p82), followed by an upscale Thai dinner at **nahm** (p80) or **Bo.lan** (p81).

Two Days

Allow the BTS to whisk you to various **shopping** (p85) destinations in central Bangkok and a visit to **Jim Thompson House**, (p60) punctuated by lunch at one of the city's **food courts** (p80). Wrap up the daylight hours with a **traditional Thai massage** (p67). Then work off those calories at the nightclubs of **RCA** (p83).

Three Days

Spend a day at **Chatuchak Weekend Market** (p87), or if it's a weekday, enrol in a **cooking school** (p69). Unwind by bumping to a DJ set at **Cosmic Café** (p84) or swaying to live folk music at **Raintree** (p85).

Four Days

Take the MRT to **Chinatown** (p59) for bustling markets and for some of the city's best old-school street food. Contrast this with an evening of bar-hopping along **Thanon Sukhumvit** (p82).