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Bangkok

Metropolitan Bangkok sprawls as impetuously as its most prominent landmark, Mae Nam Chao Phraya (Chao Phraya River). The more predictable railway line heading north from Hualamphong train station neatly divides the central city area into old and new Bangkok.

Old Bangkok cradles Ko Ratanakosin, the original royal district filled with historic monuments. Following the river north is charming Banglamphu, a residential neighbourhood of shophouses and the famous backpacker spectacle of Th Khao San. Sitting astride Banglamphu like a mahout is Dusit, home to Vimanmek Teak Mansion and the current royal residence, Chitlada Palace.

Swarming either side of Hualamphong station to the river is bustling Chinatown.

The outer western rind of Chinatown is known as Phahurat (Little India). Following the river south, you'll find the area we define as Riverside, a former European mercantile district, sprinkled with crumbling colonial-style buildings and grand churches more at home in piazzas than in *soi* (lanes).

Old Newer Bangkok is centred around Silom, Sukhumvit and Siam Square, which are crowded with skyscrapers, traffic and neon lights. Th Silom is a clogged artery that connects the river to the southern boundary of Lumpini Park and boasts infamous Patpong. Forming another boundary of Lumpini Park is Th Withayu and Soi Lang Suan, the work- and play-ground for the diplomatic corps. Credit-card addicts and fashion-obsessed teenagers leap-frog between shopping centres in the

Siam Square area surrounding Th Phra Ram I. Thanks to the Skytrain and elevated walkways, shoppers enjoy near-continuous climate control.

SIGHTS

Wat Phra Kaew & Grand Palace

Wat Phra Kaew, or, in English, the 'Temple of the Emerald Buddha', is an architectural wonder. It features gleaming gilded chedi – sometimes called pagodas – apparently floating above the ground; polished orange-and-green roof tiles piercing the humid sky; mosaic-encrusted pillars and marble pediments. The iconic Emerald Buddha sits far above worshippers in the main temple building at only 66cm high. The adjoining Grand Palace is a former royal residence. The exteriors of the four Palace buildings are also worth visiting.

*Th Na Phra Lan
Ko Ratanakosin
tel: 0 2224 1833
www.palaces.thai.net
08:30 - 15:30*

National Museum

This is Southeast Asia's largest museum and an excellent place to discover Thai art. All periods and styles are represented, including painting, ceramics, clothing and textiles, woodcarving, royal regalia, Chinese art and weaponry. The museum grounds contain the restored Buddhaisawan Chapel, built in 1795, with one of the country's most revered Buddha images, which art historians attribute to the 13th century. The museum isn't air-conditioned and English signage is sporadic. Taking a foreign-language tour will contribute greatly to your appreciation of Thailand's rich artistic history.

*Th Na Phra That
Ko Ratanakosin
tel: 0 2224 1402
www.thailandmuseum.com
09:00 - 16:00 Wed-Sun*

Jim Thompson's House

This is a must-see for architecture and art buffs. The premises belonged to Jim Thompson, who is credited for the worldwide popularity of Thai silk. He sent samples to fashion houses in Milan, London and Paris, building a steady clientele for the craft. Thompson, a New York architect who served in the Office of Strategic Services – forerunner to the CIA – collected parts of various derelict Thai homes and had them reassembled in the current location in 1959. He also had a small but splendid Asian art collection, which is on display.

*Soi Kasem San 2, Th Phra Ram I
Siam Square
tel: 0 2216 7368
tel: 0 2215 0122
www.jimthompsonhouse.org
09:00 - 17:00*

100 Tonsong Gallery

Housed in a spacious residential villa, and regarded as the city's top commercial gallery, 100 Tonsong hosts a variety of contemporary exhibitions by local and international artists. All art forms are represented, including photography, painting, sculpture, installation and mixed media. It's possible you might find the next international art star here.

*100 Soi Tonsong
Th Phoenchit
www.100tonsongallery.com*



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Bangkok

Lumphini Park

Named after Buddha's birthplace in Nepal, this is Bangkok's largest and most popular park. An artificial lake in the centre is surrounded by broad, well-tended lawns, wooded areas, walking paths and, around sunset, the odd ambling turtle - it's the best outdoor escape from Bangkok without leaving town.

*cnr Th Phra Ram IV & Th Ratchadamri
Silom
05:00 - 20:00*

Wat Pho

Of all Bangkok's temples, Wat Pho, or Temple of the Reclining Buddha, is the one most worth visiting for both its remarkable Reclining Buddha image and sprawling grounds. Wat Pho has a long list of credits: the oldest and largest wat in Bangkok, dating back to the 16th century; the longest reclining Buddha, the largest collection of Buddha images in Thailand, and the earliest centre for public education.

*Th Sanam Chai
Ko Ratanakosin
tel: 0 2221 9911
www.watpho.com
08:00 - 17:00*

Siam Center & Siam Discovery Center

These sister centres fill in the budget range between proletariat MBK and luxe Siam Paragon. The Discovery Center has a little of everything, but mainly stylish home-furnishing stores. Follow the pouty, mobile-phone crowd to link with Siam Center, which has recently been rebranded to the younger set with more fashion and thumping techno.

*cnr Th Phra Ram I & Th Phayathai
Siam Square
tel: 0 2658 1000
tel: 0 2658 1019
10:00 - 22:00*

DINING

Cy'an & Glow

The chic Metropolitan hotel's headline restaurant Cy'an is quite possibly the most faultless fine-dining experience in town. Vibrant Mediterranean and Moroccan flavours combined with a healthy obsession for the finest seafood, produce exceptional dishes, like the spiced harpuka cooked in yoghurt and braised eggplant. An eight-course tasting menu is a wonderful way to sample the food. The hotel's 'fresh food' restaurant, Glow, serves health-conscious snacks and light meals using organic ingredients.

*Metropolitan Hotel, 27 Th Sathon Tai
Silom
tel: 0 2625 3333
www.metropolitan.com.bz
06:00 - 10:30, midday- 14:00 & 18:30 - 22:30*



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Indian Hut

Specialising in North Indian and Indian Chinese, the extensive menu delivers impressive dishes. Among them is a deceptively simple red curry of tomato and onion with delectable homemade cottage cheese. The tandoor oven turns out ever-popular paprika-

spiked dishes, like the famous tandoori chicken, and a Kashmiri rogan josh comes highly recommended for its tender meat and complex flavour.

*311/2-5 Th Surawong, Silom
Silom
tel: 0 2237 8812
www.indian-hut.com
11:00 - 22:30*

D'sens

Atop the Dusit Thani hotel, overlooking Lumphini Park, this is the latest venture for Laurent and Jacques Pourcel, creators of the Michelin-starred Le Jardin des Sens in Montpellier France. The restaurant is handsome yet modern and the menu draws upon the traditions of the south of France, relying mainly on high-quality French imports. Main dishes might include a roast rack of lamb with ricotta and cauliflower puree or a beetroot and blood orange gazpacho. Amuse bouche, or palette cleansers, are served between courses, and wine recommendations from the extensive 50-page wine list accompany each dish description.

*22
Lumphini
Dusit Thani
946 Th Phra Ram IV
tel: 0 2200 9000
www.dusit.com*

Spring

Outdoor beanbag chairs line the front lawn of Summer bar, providing a rare opportunity to enjoy a quiet drink outside. Summer's sister establishment, the Spring dining room, is located in the adjoining renovated house. It combines contemporary décor, such as hard lines and polished surfaces, with traditional Thai food. You might try Spring's signature Thai fish cakes before indulging in one of its famously fresh house-made desserts.

*199 Soi Piamsri 2, Soi 39, Th Sukhumvit
btwn Soi 39 & Soi 49
Sukhumvit
tel: 0 2392 2747
11:30 - 14:30 & 17:00 - 22:30*

Bussaracum

Specialising in recipes once reserved for royalty, Bussaracum is renowned for its authentic and lavish Thai cuisine. The extensive menu features intricate dishes and house-made curry pastes with complex but subtle flavours. Everything is beautifully presented, from delicate purple dumpling flowers to dramatically carved squash overflowing with seafood. The dining room is a fittingly regal affair, decorated with gold statues and with linen-dressed tables adorned with fresh flowers.

*Sethiwan Tower
Silom
139 Soi Pan, Th Silom
tel: 2266 6312*

ENTERTAINMENT

Sala Rim Nam

The riverside Sala Rim Naam – a stunning Thai pavilion made of teak, marble and bronze – holds nightly classical dance performances, which are far superior to the average tourist fare. It's hosted by the Oriental Hotel, which is a short boat-ride across the river, so the accompanying meal is as inspired and refined as the show.

*Oriental Hotel
48 Soi Oriental, Th Charoen Krung
Riverside
tel: 0 2437 2918
www.mandarinoriental.com/bangkok/
dinner & show 19:00 - 22:00*



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Living Room

Although it's not exactly a smoky den filled with finger-snapping jazz cats, every night the Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit's deceptively bland hotel lounge transforms into one of Bangkok's best spots for live jazz. From proponents of Swing to crooners, Living Room hosts a range of international musicians.

*Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit
btwn Soi 12 & Soi 14
250 Th Sukhumvit
Sukhumvit
tel: 0 2649 8888
www.sheratongrandesukhumvit.com
21:00 - 01:00*

Banyan Tree Spa

Leave your stress with your mobile phone at the door. This luxury hotel spa delivers modern elegance and world-class pampering. The spa housed on the hotel's upper floors look out over a silent and peaceful vision of Bangkok. Spend a languorous 90 minutes enjoying a Thai, Swedish or Balinese massage. Body scrubs, beauty treatments, and aromatic herbal wraps boasting medicinal properties round out the spa's offerings.

*Banyan Tree Hotel & Spa
21/100 Th Sathon Tai
<http://banyantreespa.com/bangkok>*

HOTELS

Metropolitan

Chic and sleek, this luxurious hotel is unflinchingly modern and defiantly cool. Expect designer-dressed staff, Bose sound equipment, original artworks and organic gastronomy. There's a world-class holistic spa, restaurants with top international chefs and the hippest members' bar in Bangkok. Rooms successfully mix business with pleasure, fitted with modern points and yoga mats, broadband access and cable TV. The Metropolitan Hotel's every detail has been conceptualised to present a unique hotel experience that's been custom designed for comfort.

*27 Th Sathon Tai
Silom
Direct the taxi to well-known Sukhothai Hotel next door. From Sala Daeng Skytrain, walk down Th Sala Daeng and turn left onto Th Sathon.
tel: 0 2625 3333
www.metropolitan.como.bz*

Dusit Thani

Situated in a prime location opposite Lumpini park, the Dusit Thani offers classical elegance. It's very popular with business travellers because of the stately rooms, and impeccable service. The 'Club' rooms have high-tech fixtures and complimentary executive extras, like meeting rooms with espresso machines and hot and cold towels given to refresh oneself on arrival. For those non-work hours, there's a rooftop golf-driving range, spa and eight dining options, including one of Bangkok's best restaurants – D'Sens.

*946 Th Phra Ram IV
opposite Lumpini Pk
From Sala Daeng skytrain, walk east up Th Silom.
The hotel is on the southwest corner of Lumpini Pk.
Silom
tel: 0 2200 9000
bangkok.dusit.com*



© Richard In'anson. Lonely Planet Images.

Shangri-La Hotel

A grand and luxurious hotel by the river, the Shangri-La is an elegant establishment surrounded by tropical gardens. Doormen, in safari suits, usher patrons

through a lavish lobby where hallways lead to a realm of exclusive bars, reputed restaurants and exotic foliage. Guests reside in minimalist modern Asian décor, all warm wood and smooth curved lines. Seemingly boundless opportunities to unwind await the weary traveller – try the signature Himalayan Healing Stone massage.

*89 Soi Wat Suan Phlu, Th Charoen Krung
Silom
From the Tha Oriental ferry it's easily spotted. From Saphan Taksin Skytrain, cut directly down the soi to the left, without passing through Th Charoen Krung.
tel: 2236 7777
www.shangri-la.com*

Oriental Hotel

Dating back to 1876, the Oriental Hotel is one of Southeast Asia's grand colonial-era hotels and one of the most-luxurious and most-respected in the region. The hotel's rich history lives on in the original Author's Wing, a Victorian-era, gingerbread-style residence with rooms and suites dedicated to the famous writers who stayed here, including Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham, Noel Coward and Gore Vidal. The management prides itself on highly personalised, formal service. An air of establishment extends to the famed Normandie French restaurant and the hotel's bars.

*48 Oriental Avenue
www.mandarinoriental.com/bangkok*

Peninsula Hotel

The Peninsula is world class, with all the international accolades to prove it. The lobby is distinguished, by its squared black-marble hallways. Situated on the Thonburi side of the river, the Peninsula looks out on both the river and the skyline beyond. Many of the 370 rooms boast panoramic views and marble bathrooms. All of which is complemented by classic, unpretentious service, fine restaurants and one of the city's finest spas.

*333 Th Charoen Nakhon
Klong San
From the Tha Oriental ferry dock, the Peninsula will take you across the river on its private barge. Skytrain*

*Saphan Taksin is also nearby.
tel: 2861 2888
bangkok.peninsula.com
ferry: private ferry dock near the Oriental Hotel*

FACT FACTS

Population

8000000

Language

Thai

Currency

Baht
THB

Money & cost

Items sold by street vendors or in many shops are negotiable - Thais respect a good haggler. Tipping is not widespread in Bangkok, except in expensive hotels and restaurants.

When to go

While there's no bad time to visit Bangkok, the weather is most agreeable between November and February. The tourists descend in December and August; May, June and September are calmer.

Electricity

220V
50Hz

Phone

country dialling code: 66
mobile network: GSM 900/1800, NMT 900

Local Cathay Pacific contact information

Reservation numbers: (66) 22630606
Check-in counters: Suvarnabhumi International Airport, Area M, Counters M06 - M20



Bangkok

LUXE CITY GUIDES RECOMMEND

The following suggestions are selected exclusively for Cathay Pacific by LUXE City Guides, the consummately stylish pocket travel guide, packed with astute, opinionated information for the busy and sophisticated visitor.visitor.

Accommodation

The Eugenia. Relaxed, rustic, colonial-style nest with Flamant linen, copper baths, antiques, suave **Admiral Zheng He Lounge, D.B. Bradley** dining room and snazz restored vintage car fleet. Quite the charmer. 267 Sukhumvit Soi 31 / 02 259 9011 / theeugenia.com

Restaurants

Bed Supperclub. The set menu here is consistently good, so kick off your Beatrix Ongs and dine supine on mod Euro bites in this extraordinary, white, bed-laden, Barbarella spaceship complete with fun performance art. Bring ID no matter how long it's been since you were asked for it. 26 Sukhumvit Soi 11 / 02 651 3537 / daily / bedsupperclub.com

Patara. Enjoy Siamese refinement in a stately double-storey converted residence, laden with teak and rich, bright silks, plus twinkly tropical garden and delectable Thai plates. 375 Thonglor Soi 19 / 02 185 2960 / lunch & dinner daily / patarathailand.com

Baan Klang Nam. This popular, airy, pierside pavilion firing up scrumptious Thai seafood is slightly out of the way but worth the schlep. Ask for an outside table. Rama 3 Rd (nr Jatujak 3) / 02 682 7180 / 11am-10.30pm daily / original riverside location at 288 Rama 3 Rd Soi 14 / 02 292 0175

Bar

Long Table. Commodious hipanista hotpad for panoramazing terrace sips or glowy timber and said long table inside, plus a pool for the sloshed. Hic. 25/F / 48 Column Bldg / Sukhumvit Soi 16 / 02 302 2557 / longtablebangkok.com

Spa

Harnn Heritage Spa. This delish Thai skin and spa brand also has a dark, tranquil haven for full body treatments, massages and facials, and plenty of products to buy. Shame about having to use the mall loos. 4/F / Siam Paragon / 02 610 9715 / harnn.com

Shopping

Gaysorn. Label Mabel mall housing fashion and homewares from a host of top of the pops Thai talents. Purses akimbo, ride the elevator to the 2nd floor and find funky gals' bags at **Tango**, groovy retro fash at **Kloset** and floaty fem threads at **Senada Theory**. Screen divas frock up on both ready-to-wear and bespoke gowns at **Fly Now**, then gal-heaven **Sretsis** is choice for a spot of vintage, quirk and flirt. Ascend to the third floor to find covetables for home, including **D&O Shop**, showcasing only the juiciest picks from the Thai Design and Objects Association. Gaysorn / 999 Ploenchit Rd / opp. Grand Hyatt Erawan / 02 656 1149 / Skytrain: Chit Lom / gaysorn.com

Activities

M.R. Kukrit's Historical House. Pretty old Thai house and gardens where you can catch up on that macramé unikini in one of the sweet little salas. A hidden pleasure undiscovered by the coach-load legions. Weekends only or by appointment. 19 Soi Phra Pinit / second soi on the right off Sathorn Soi 3 / 02 286 8185

Ayutthaya. The ancient former Thai capital lies just over an hour north of Bangkok, and its glorious ruins are well worth a goggle. The **Shangri-La Hotel** will zip you there by bus in the morning, and back by river on their luxury Horizon II - lunch included, natch. Call the Shangri-La Hotel on 02 236 7777 / Mon, Wed, Fri, Sat / 8am return 5pm

The Blue Elephant Cooking Classes. Take the morning class at this resto where the chef drags you to the market, then forces you to create divine dishes, which you then consume. Outrageous. 233 South Sathorn Rd / 02 673 9353 / blueelephant.com

