

Bangkok Information

Introduction

Bangkok is one of Asia's most cosmopolitan cities. Created the Thai capital in 1782 by the first monarch of the present Chakri dynasty, Bangkok is a national treasure house and Thailand's spiritual, cultural, political, commercial, educational and diplomatic centre. Major tourism attractions include glittering Buddhist temples, palaces, timeless 'Venice of the East' canal and river scenes, classical dance extravaganzas, an almost legendary nightlife, and numerous air-conditioned shopping centres selling Thai silks, cottons, gemstones, bronze and pewterware and many more internationally admired handicrafts. Bangkok exceeds 1,500 square kilometers in area. Its population of over 6 million means that approximately one in every ten Thais is a Bangkokian.

Major Attractions

The Grand Palace & Wat Phra Kaeo (Chapel of the Emerald Buddha)



Wat Phra Kaeo, situated in the same compound of the Grand Palace, is a treasure house of Thai arts, and houses the Emerald Buddha, the most revered Buddha image in Thailand. Three main buildings inside the temple which form up a glittering scene are the Golden Stupa, enshrining the relics of the Buddha, the Phra Mondop or the Library, housing the Tripitaka or a Buddhist scripture, the Royal Pantheon which is a pavilion used for keeping statues of deceased kings of Chakri dynasty. Besides, the 178 section mural paintings which depict the story of the Ramayana are the superb masterpiece of Rattanakosin artisans. The compound of Wat Phra Kaeo and the Grand Palace is open daily from 8.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m..

The admission fee is 200 baht, including the entry to the Royal Thai Decorations & Coins Pavilion in the same compound and to Vimanmek Mansion Museum on Ratchawithi Road.

Sanam Luang (Phramen Ground)

This oval public ground in front of the Grand Palace enclave is used for various royal ceremonies, including the Royal Ploughing Ceremony each May, and is edged by several noteworthy institutions. These include the **Fine Arts Department**, **Thammasat University**, and the **National Museum**, which houses a superb collection of artifacts and objects dating from the Bronze Age. The **National Theatre** regularly stages classical dance drama performances, the **National Gallery** houses a collection of traditional and contemporary paintings by leading Thai artists, and **Lak Muang** (City Pillar Shrine) on the southeast corner of Sanam Luang, contains a stone pillar placed there by King Rama I as the foundation stone for his new capital of Bangkok. Lak Muang is believed by many to have the power of granting wishes.

Admission to the National Museum is 40 baht. The museum is open every day except Mondays and Tuesdays and annual holidays, 9.00 AM until 4.00 PM. The National Theatre can be contacted at 224-1342 on weekdays (8.30 AM-4.30 PM) for details of current programmes.

Admission to the National Gallery is 30 baht. It is open to public everyday except Mondays, Tuesdays, and public holidays from 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.

Wat Pho (Temple of the Reclining Buddha)

This large and extensive temple neighbours the Grand Palace enclave and contains a gigantic gold plated Reclining Buddha some 46 metres long and 15 metres high, and with inlaid mother-of-pearl soles.

Wat Arun (Temple of Dawn)

This famous Chao Phraya riverbank landmark, diagonally opposite the Grand Palace, is best known for a porcelain encrusted 79-metre central pagoda (phra prang) which sparkles in the sun.

Vimanmek Palace (The Celestial Residence)

Or Vimanmek Mansion Museum, located on Ratchawithi Road behind the National Assembly, is the world's largest golden teak building. The 3-storey palace contains 81 rooms, halls and ante-chambers. A guided tour inside the building is provided to visitors. Other buildings in the same compound are also used as museums and display various items and art objects. The compound is open daily from 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. Admission fee is 50 baht.

Wat Traimit (Temple of the Golden Buddha)

Located at the end of Chinatown's Yaowarat Road, near Hualampong Railway Station, this temple houses an ancient solid gold seated Buddha image, three metres in height and weighing five and a half tons.

Wat Benchamabophit (The Marble Temple)

Located in Si Ayutthaya Road, near Chitralada Palace, this unique marble temple was constructed during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910), employs European ecclesiastic details, such as stained glass windows, and contains a superb cloister collection of bronze Buddha images.

Wat Suthat & The Giant Swing

Located on Bamrung Muang Road, this temple is noted for its superb 19th-century murals in the main chapel. The distinctive Giant Swing outside the temple was once used in Brahmanic ceremonial long since discontinued.

Wat Saket (The Golden Mount)

Wat Saket's major feature is the Golden Mount, dating from the 1800s, which overlooks Ratchadamnoen Avenue. The golden chedi houses relics of Lord Buddha and offers a panoramic view of historic Bangkok. Other inner-city temples that merit visits include **Wat Mahathat**, a Buddhist university edging Sanam Luang, **Wat Ratchabophit** on Ban Mo Road, **Wat Intharawihan** on Wisutkasat Road, with its 32-metre-high standing Buddha image, and **Wat Ratchanatdaram**, behind the Rama III Memorial Park on Ratcha-damnoen Avenue, with its pink **Loha Prasat**.



Royal Barges National Museum

This shed, where several royal barges are displayed, is located near Phra Pin Klao Bridge. The barges were used on royal occasions and formerly served as war vessels. The most beautiful barge is “**Suphannahong**” used by the king only when he made his royal river procession for the Kathin ceremony, a Buddhist tradition of offering robes to monks, usually during October to November. The unique design and decorative details of each barge should be of great interest to all visitors.

The shed is open everyday from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. Admission fee is 30 baht.

Jim Thompson's Thai House

This remarkable Thai-style house, was the work of Mr. Jim Thompson, an American who came to Thailand at the end of the Second World War and revived the Thai silk industry. His house, now a museum, is at the end of Soi Kasemsan 2 opposite the National Stadium on Rama I Road. On permanent display are Mr. Thompson's collection of Asian artifacts and many other fabulous antiques. Volunteer guides explain the collection to visitors.

Admission fee is 100 baht. Open everyday, 9.00 AM until 4.30 PM.



Suan Pakkard Palace

Located on Si Ayutthaya Road, this complex of five Thai-style houses occupies a beautiful garden and houses an important collection of Asian antiques. A lacquer pavilion is decorated with sumptuous late Ayutthaya period (1350-1767) gold-leaf Murals.

Admission fee 50 baht. Open Monday through Saturday, from 9.00 AM until 4.00 PM.

Pasteur Institute Snake Farm

Located near Chulalongkorn Hospital, on the corner of Henri Dunant and Rama IV roads, the Snake Farm contains a collection of poisonous snakes which are 'milked' daily for their venom in order to produce invaluable anti-snakebite serum.

Admission fee is 40 baht. Venom is extracted from the snakes every day, at 10.30 AM and 2.00 PM on weekdays, and at 10.30 AM on public holidays.

Dusit Zoo Located beside the Royal Plaza, Bangkok's oldest zoo contains a collection of popular African and Asian mammals and birds in an ornamental garden.

Admission fee is 10 baht. The zoo is open every day from 8.00 AM until 6.00 PM.

Kamthieng House

This is a classic northern-style teak house, originally constructed in Chiang Mai more than 200 years ago and donated to Siam Society by its owners. It is located at 131 Soi Asoke (Sukhumvit Soi 21). A variety of Thai flora can be seen in its garden. Also on display are items used daily by Thai farmers and fishermen.

Admission fee is 100 baht. Open daily except Sundays and Mondays from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.

Bangkok Doll Museum

Located on Soi Ratchataphan, off Ratchaprarop Road, this museum exhibits dolls from many countries including Thai dolls in both classical and tribal costumes.

The museum is open daily, except Sundays, from 8.00 AM until 5.00 PM. Call (02) 2453008 for more information.

King Rama IX Park

This 200-acre botanical garden-cum-public park is located deep inside Sukhumvit Soi 103 (Udomsuk) and was opened in 1987 to commemorate the 60th birthday of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

Admission fee is 10 baht. The park is open daily from 6.00 AM until 6.00 PM.

Siam City Park

Located in suburban Minburi, some 30-minutes east of the Lat Phrao flyover, this water amusement park contains a man-made sea with artificial surf, whirlpools, fountains, waterfalls and towering sliders. Satellite attractions include a children's playground, aviaries, open zoo and botanical garden.

Admission fee is 200 baht for adults, 150 baht for children. Open daily from 10.00 AM until 8.00 PM.

Safari World

This 300-acre complex is also located in Minburi, via Km 9 on Raminthra Road. The complex is divided into four sections, namely a Safari Park populated by African and Asian mammals, a Bird Park, a Macaw Island, and a Games Corner.

Admission fee is 400 baht for adults, and 300 for children. The complex is open daily from 9.00 AM until 5.00 PM.

The Chao Phraya River & Bangkok's Canals (Khlongs)

Nineteenth-century Bangkok was laced with canals, giving the capital the designation 'Venice of the East'. Surviving canals, and the Chao Phraya River (River of Kings) provide memorable vignettes of a traditional waterborne way-of-life that has remained essentially unchanged over the centuries. The river and canals may be conveniently explored by public transport.

Express Boat Trip/Bangkok-Nonthaburi

An express boat service on the Chao Phraya River connects Bangkok with the northern neighbouring province of Nonthaburi, starting from the Wat Ratsingkhon Pier near Krung Thep Bridge. The fare is 7 baht. Major sights include the Memorial Bridge, Wat Arun, the riverine Grand Palace and Thammasat University. The most convenient boarding points are Tha Chang Pier near the Grand Palace, and Tha Phra Chan Pier near Thammasat University. The express boat service operates daily from 6.00 AM until 8.00 PM.

Khlong Mon

Boats leave every 30 minutes, daily, from 6.30 AM until 6.00 PM, from Tha Tian Pier behind Wat Pho. The single fare is 4 baht. Picturesque sights include canalside temples, orchards, orchid farms and perpetually fascinating vignettes of waterborne life.

Khlong Bang Waek

Boats leave the Memorial Bridge Pier every 15 minutes from 6.00 AM until 9.30 PM. The single fare is 10 baht. Scenic attractions include canalside temples and orchid farms.

Khlongs Bang Khun Wiang & Bang Yai

Boats leave Tha Chang Pier near the Grand Palace every 20 minutes between 6.15 AM and 8.00 PM. The single fare is 10 baht. Scenic attractions include canalside temples, the Royal Barge Boatsheds, Thaistyle houses and the early morning Khu Wiang Floating Market which operates between 4 and 7.00 AM.

Chao Phraya River

Dinner Cruises

Riverine Bangkok offers some of the capital's most arresting sights, particularly at night when the weather is cooler and light reflections bestow the Chao Phraya River with flickering magic and romance. An ideal way of combining dining with riverine enchantment is to enjoy a river dinner cruise.

Special Interests

Thai Boxing

This unique martial art of 'Muay Thai' can be seen in its commercial form throughout the week at two major boxing stadiums, Lumpini, on Sunday, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday, and Ratchadamnoen, on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. Programmes generally feature eight bouts, and commence at 6.00 PM.



Buddhist Meditation

The headquarters of the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) at 33 Sukhumvit Road, between Soi 1 and Soi 3, is the most convenient place to learn about Thai Buddhism and meditation in certain Bangkok temples. The WFB conducts a meditation class in English each Wednesday from 5.00 PM until 8.00 PM.

Cultural Performances

Thai and international cultural performances, including orchestral performances, ballet, mime and jazz and pop concerts, are frequently staged at the National Theatre (Tel: 224-1342) at Sanam Luang, the Thailand Cultural Centre (Tel: 247-0028) on Ratchadaphisek Road, and the Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre (Tel: 299-3000-9) on New Ratchadaphisek Road. Details of current events can generally be found in Bangkok's major English language newspapers.

Traditional Thai Massage

This therapeutic and highly soothing form of massage purportedly evolved from rishis (forest-dwelling Brahmin hermit ascetics) who relieved the physical stress of extended periods of meditation by adopting certain postures. A school of traditional Thai massage is located in Wat Pho (Tel:221-2974), where a two-week course costing 4,500 baht is taught for anyone interested in mastering this arcane art.

Thai Cooking The Thai cuisine gains increasing international favour. Visitors wishing to learn how to cook Thai food can contact the Thai Cooking School at the Oriental Hotel (Tel: 437-6211, 437-3080), the Modern Housewife Centre (Tel: 279-2831-4), or the UFM Food Centre Co. Ltd. (259-0620-30) for full details.



Shopping

Shopping is one of Bangkok's major attractions. Favourite purchases include Thai silks and cottons, modern and traditional jewellery featuring precious gemstones such as sapphires, rubies, emeralds and diamonds, semi-precious stones including opals, jades, topazes, turquoises and zircons, silverware, nielloware, pewterware, bronzeware, ceramics, specially high-fired celadon, leather goods, woodcarvings, paintings, custom-tailored clothing and any of the one thousand and one items produced by skilled Thai artisans. Bangkok is one of the most competitively priced cities in Asia. Friendly bargaining in most stores and markets ensure favourable prices and service. There are six clearly defined city shopping areas:

Phatphong/Suriwong/Silom Area

Major hotels include the Montian and Dusit Thani. Numerous shops, and department stores, sell jewellery, gemstones, antiques, ceramics, leather goods, men's and women's clothing, handicrafts, Thai silks and cottons, electrical and photographic goods. The area comprises Bangkok's major commercial and nightlife centre.

Mahasarakham/Silom/New Road Area

Principal hotels include the Shangri-la, Oriental and Sheraton Royal Orchid. The area is a major gemstone dealing and jewellery manufacturing area. Boutiques, art galleries, department stores and shopping arcades, including the River City complex, sell a wide range of items, with particular emphasis on antiques, tailored clothing, and contemporary Thai and Asian paintings.

Phloen Chit /Pathumwan Area

Principal hotels include Le Meridien, the Hyatt Erawan, Arnoma, Regent, Imperial and Siam-Intercontinental. The area encompasses several department stores and shopping centres, such as the World Trade Center, Siam Square, Siam Centre and Mahboonkrong. Almost everything the shopper needs may be found within this area. Thailand's principal duty-free shopping outlet is located on the 7th floor of the World Trade Center.

Sukhumvit Area

Principal hotels include the Landmark, Ambassador and Sheraton Grande. Concentrated largely between Soi Nana (Soi 3) and Soi Asoke (Soi 21), several shops, shopping centres and department stores offer a broad range of Thai and imported items. The Nana Entertainment Complex on Soi 4 is one of Bangkok's favourite nightlife areas.

Pratunam/Petchaburi Road Area

Principal hotels include the Amari Watergate and Indra regent. The area is best known for its inexpensive readymade clothing, which is sold partly in a street market, where determined bargaining is required for best prices.

Banglamphu

This riverine section of Bangkok is favoured by back-packers for its budget accommodation. The area offers inexpensive items, especially readymade clothing, leather goods, footwear, cosmetics and curios. Bargaining is recommended.

Principal Markets

Chatuchak Weekend Market

An approximately 35-acre public park on Phaholyothin Road, opposite the Northern Bus Terminal, and known locally as Suan Chatuchak, is the site of a popular weekend market which sells at least one thousand different local products including pets, handicrafts, plants, fresh fruit, antique reproductions, shoes, toys, clothing and domestic utensils. The weekend market is open on Saturday and Sunday from dawn to dusk, or approximately 7.00 AM until 6.00 PM.



Bang Rak Market

Located on New Road, between Silom and Sathon roads, this market offers a particularly large selection of cut blooms and orchids. Lovely garlands made principally of jasmine are a specialty.

Thewet Market

Lining the bank of Khlong Phadung Krung Kasem off Samsen Road, this market is best known for potted plants.

Lang Krasuang Market

Facing Khlong Lot, on Atsadang Road, between the Royal Hotel and Interior Ministry, a row of shophouses sell moderately priced second-hand goods, including antique cameras and typewriters, musical instruments, radios, and all manner of electrical goods. Bargaining is essential.

Woeng Nakhon Kasem

Better known as 'Thieves Market', located between Yaowarat Road and New Road, near Phahurat, this area sells antiques, including Thai and Chinese objets d'art, porcelain, brassware, copperware and furniture inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Bargaining is essential.

Dining/Nightlife

Simply stated, Bangkok is one of the best eating places in the world, for gourmet and gourmand alike. Almost every major cuisine in the world is represented in specialty restaurants located throughout the city. Quality Thai and Chinese food is ubiquitous in outlets as diverse as coffee shops and street front restaurants, markets and food centres found in shopping arcades, department stores and hotels. Several complimentary English-language tourism guides, available at hotel reception desks, provide comprehensive listings of choice eating places. The classified advertisement pages of Bangkok's most popular English language newspapers are another reliable source of information for good dining. Bangkok's nightlife is almost legendary. Nightlife outlets are found citywide. Beyond hotels, the most popular nightlife areas are the Phatphong area between Silom and Surawong roads, the Soi Nana and Soi Cowboy areas on Sukhumvit Road, and the New Phetchaburi Road area between Sukhumvit Soi 21 and 71. Aforementioned complimentary English-language tourism magazines list the most popular outlets, such as bars, discotheques, restaurants featuring Thai classical dance and cocktail lounges.



Transportation

Buses

Public buses are plentiful and cheap, with a minimum fare of 3.50 baht to most destinations within metropolitan Bangkok. Air-conditioned buses have minimum and maximum fares of 8 and 20 baht respectively. Airconditioned minibuses charge a flat fare of 30 baht on all routes. A Bus Route Map is available at most hotels, bookshops and the TAT office on Ratchadamnoen Avenue for 35 baht.

Taxis

Hotel taxis have fixed rates. Taxis cruising city streets are metered. They charge a minimum of 35 baht, for the first 3 kilometres, and approximately 5 baht per kilometer thereafter.

Tuk-Tuks

These three-wheeled 'open-air' motorized taxis are popular for short journeys. Fares must be bargained in advance. Minimum fares, for journeys of up to 3 kilometres, are approximately 30 baht.



Festivals

Besides nationally celebrated events on public holidays, including Buddhist holy days and the traditional Thai New Year, Songkran, celebrated each April, Bangkok hosts a number of important annual events. They include:

New Year's Celebrations

Generally celebrated on January 1, located around Sanam Luang, and marked by early morning Buddhist merit-making, and afternoon and evening folk entertainment.

Royal Ploughing Ceremony

Staged every May at Sanam Luang, and presided over by H.M. the King, to mark the official commencement of the rice-planting season.

H.M. the Queen's Birthday

Celebrated each August 12. Public buildings, particularly in the Ratchadamnoen and Grand Palace areas are illuminated at night.

Chulalongkorn Day

Celebrated each October 23, principally beside the equestrian statue of King Chulalongkorn (reign: 1868-1910), the monarch generally credited with saving Thailand from western colonialisation, and who modernized his country, besides abolishing slavery.

Trooping of the Colours

Celebrated each December 3, preceding H.M. King Bhumibol's birthday, the elite Royal Guards swear anew their allegiance to their monarch in a colourful ceremony in the Royal Plaza.

H.M. the King's Birthday

Celebrated each December 5 with Buddhist merit-making, spectacular evening illuminations in the Grand Palace and Ratchadamnoen areas, and public entertainment principally in the form of folk dramas and open-air filmshows at Sanam Luang.

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