

TRAVEL GUIDES

Bangkok Guide

By Rowena Carr-Allinson | Posted: Friday 21 October 2011

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Bangkok is buzzing. Its fascinating mix of old and new – of ancient traditions and glorious temples, and honking horns, traffic and a constant stream of people walking, talking and cooking on the pavements – gives the city a magical and highly charged atmosphere...

Where to Stay in Bangkok

In a country where attention to detail is everything, it pays to make the most of luxurious Thai design, the incredible hospitality and beautiful surroundings. Orchids, oversized vases, flickering tea lights and stylish exotic hardwood furniture are just a few of the little touches that make all the difference in Bangkok's hotels.

The **Banyan Tree** in Silom Sathorn is a luxe-y sanctuary of peace. All the rooms are beautifully decorated with sumptuous silks and teak wood, the service is immaculate and the **rooftop pool** has a jaw-dropping skyline view. Upgrade to a club-room and you get the benefit of plenty of great freebies and are treated like absolute royalty.

Right next door, you'll find the sleek **Sukhothai**, where more luxury awaits. The hotel blends East and West, tradition and modernity perfectly – from its pristine interiors to the beautiful Jim Thompson silks and the calming water features of the gardens. Next door, at the 171-room Metropolitan Hotel (sister to London's) it's all about contemporary minimalism. Expect fine Egyptian cotton linens, lovely fluffy goose down duvets, sleek marble bathrooms and smooth staff clad in Comme des Garçons.

Where to Eat in Bangkok

For jaw-dropping views of the Bangkok skyline head for the Vertigo Restaurant, perched on the 61st floor of the Banyan Tree. With gourmet Thai cuisine (try the tender Snow Fish and delicious pistachio-chocolate desserts) and a swish, twinkling bar, it's the ideal spot for dinner or aperitifs. (Beware, though, the bar does have a dress code and flip flops – even the fanciest kind – are strictly verboten.)

If you like your food on the spicy side, try the Metropolitan's Namh (the Bangkok arm of David Thompson's **Namh** in the **Halkin**), which is all stylish dark woods, beautiful flower displays and sleek staff dressed head-to-toe in black.

On a lower budget? Bangkok is packed with cheap and cheerful places aperitifs. (Beware, though, the bar does have a dress code and flip flops – even the fanciest kind – are strictly verboten.)

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On a lower budget? Bangkok is packed with cheap and cheerful places to eat, too, with small local **restaurants** offering curries and delicious Pad Thais. Or you can even try your luck at the street vendors... For something different, try the mall's food courts – like the one at the Siam mall which has everything down to a Starbucks. At the shiny new Paragon mall, the selection of goodies is amazing – from sushi to steaks and frozen yoghurt, and so much more...

Where to Go Out in Bangkok

For a little romance, the riverside terrace at the Mandarin Oriental (Charoenkrung Soi 40; +66 2 659 9000) is perfect. Flickering candle lights, fairy lights in the frangipani trees and smooth staff in bronze silk make it one of the best places to sample a cocktail while watching the water taxis cruise the river. Make sure you skip wine in favour of a local Tiger beer or a 'Sense' cocktail – a Mojito with a strawberry twist.

At the Sukhothai, the outdoor covered bar's smooth DJ tunes and daybeds make for a chilled atmosphere in which to start the night. The drinks bill is steep, but the fact that you can sit outdoors even as the rain is pouring is a real bonus.

The 'Sois' (numbered side streets) just off Sukhumvit are packed with bars and terraces ideal for a drink or two al fresco as you watch the world go by. For some dancing, try the Bed Supperclub (26 Soi Sukhumvit 11; +66 2 651 3537) where beautiful people shake the night away to international DJs' dance music, while hitting the cocktails. The Sois are also home to the infamous Pat Pong – which is worth a quick look (although possibly not more than that...)

What to Wear in Bangkok

Bangkok is such a melting pot that it's tough to pin down a specific look. The key is to dress for the hot, sultry weather (without forgetting a Plan B for the air-con obsession) and go light. To make sweeping generalisations you could say that the Thais are on the petite side, so you'll definitely see heels galore, and with the high humidity and searing temperatures, the outfits tend to be on the small side... but anything goes as long as it's laid-back and on-trend. (To get into the smarter hotel bars, bear in mind that the backpacker look isn't welcome.)

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Where to Go for Pampering in Bangkok

Thailand is renowned for its fantastic spas, combining the perfect balance of mind, body and spirit. Even in the city, it's possible to have a totally serene experience. The big hotels all have their own swish spas, from the Banyan Tree where you can sip a Cardamon tea while taking in the water features before disappearing into one of the 23 treatment rooms for a Thai Ginger Healer, a Hawaiian Lomi Lomi or a Balinese Boreh to the lovely, zen-like urban sanctuary that is the COMO Shambhala Spa at the Metropolitan.

To bump into the likes of Pierce Brosnan and Goldie Hawn in their dressing gowns, try the Mandarin Oriental's Spa. And, for the real thing, head to the Wat Po temple to pick up the techniques from the Thai massage school there.

Where to Shop in Bangkok

Bangkok is a shopping paradise. You'll find everything from modern malls to traditional, chaotic markets. It goes without saying that you shouldn't miss the amazing Chatuchak market where covered stalls stretch on forever, and different areas specialise in different goods – whether it's arts and crafts, home furnishings and mother of pearl dishes, silverware and beautifully made knick-knacks, leather chairs and vintage T-shirts, army gear and, of course, plenty of knock-offs... Just remember – haggling should be a pleasure.

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The best time to go on a spree? After sunset to avoid the knock-out heat. Try the Night Bazaar off Lumpini Station: a maze of stalls perfect for handicrafts from silk cushion covers to jewellery and Batik. At Paragon, another huge new mall – complete with aquarium on the ground floor, and cinema on top – you'll find luxury **fashion** brands like Louis Vuitton and Hermes, but also high street staples like Zara, Mango and Guess.

Don't Leave Bangkok Without...

...something made to measure. It's not often you can get something bespoke made, so make the most of the city's tailors like Jim Man on Sukhumvit where you can choose the material off the shelf – from lovely thick cottons to smooth silks. You'll recognise his logo, which might just have been borrowed from Hugh Hefner...

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