

Bangkok BABY

Rowena Carr-Allinson discovered there's more to Bangkok than seedy bars and markets with her two-year-old son Lennox

“**B**angkok – with a two-year-old? Really?” Most of the reactions I received were confused, a few impressed, but mostly surprised, to obvious shock and horror.

When you tell people you're taking a toddler to Bangkok you'll see a lot of eyebrows rise. Indeed the chaotic, bubbling city, home to almost seven million people, doesn't seem like the first choice for a family trip. But once you've made the 13 hour flight (best taken overnight to maximise chances of sleep), cracked the city's crazy traffic and how to get around it, there's plenty to keep you and the little one busy.

For starters, take in the cultural sights, like the Temple of the Reclining Buddha or the Emerald Buddha, it's amazing how much kids enjoy these giant, intricately-decorated wonders, or simply soak up the atmosphere. Little eyes and ears open wide as they take in the typically Thai golden pagoda roofs, the saffron-swathed monks, the music, the buzz, the life, the stray cats: all the differences in every little thing of daily life...

GETTING FROM A TO B

To Pram Or Not To Pram

Our first big dilemma was whether to bring a pram or not. The internet is awash with advice about the great pram debate, and for good reason. The public transport, which, although incredibly clean, and efficient, wasn't designed with prams in mind. With the sky train (BTS) rising high above the city, getting on involves a great many steps! We opted to take ours, for longer excursions and because I frankly can't lug

a 14 kg little boy around for that long, knowing it would only be feasible with a two-parent team.

Taxis, Trains & Tuk Tuks

With taxis being incredibly cheap, they are probably the best means of toddler transport (if you are willing to forget all your baby-seat security training) though the Thai capital's gridlock traffic can be tricky! When lucky enough to find a friendly one, as we did, it's wise to make him your regular driver. Ours – Saman – became a great friend to Lennox, despite the obvious language barrier.

We also took the impeccable sky train and the subway, a treat in itself. Our wide-eyed toddler loved every minute of riding the rails, hopping across the city, in air-conditioned comfort. It was also a great place to socialise with locals who fawned over him, especially once he mastered the 'wai' (prayer like-greeting) and his only Thai: 'Sawatdee khap' (hello). Incidentally, it seems that children trump everyone, so you're always guaranteed a seat with a little one in tow. A nice perk at rush hour!

Another must was the Chao Express River Express. A commuter boat, it's a quick jaunt along the riverside. Faster than the usual tourist cruises, it's the best way of seeing the elaborate temples of Wat Po, the Royal Palace and the high-speed long tail boats for energetic toddlers...

Bangkok's infamous tuk tuks were by far the biggest hit though. The funky motorisedrickshaws were so popular, we made Lennox's day by acquiring a 'tuk tuk' T-shirt at the incredible Chatuchak Weekend market. A maze of stalls that goes on forever, it's one of the city's ►



CANARY WHARF RECOMMENDS:

WHERE TO STAY

Rowena chose to stay in a serviced apartment for a semblance of home, allowing them the freedom to cook, and thus sticking to a routine of sorts while still having all the perks of a hotel stay.

FOR THE INDEPENDENTS...

Anantara Sathorn, two bedroom 121m2 suites with full kitchens from £82 per night. ananatra.com

FOR THE TRADITIONALISTS

Anantara Riverside Bangkok Discovery (until 31/12/2014) from £90 per night in Deluxe Premier Room, including breakfast for two (+£6/child 4-11) and a private Klong Tour. ananatra.com

In addition, Holiday Extras can sort out the little additional perks that make travelling smoother (0800 1313 777 / holidayextras.co.uk)



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► most amazing attractions and fantastic for shopping and bargaining, though challenging for a toddler. To let our son stretch his legs, we hit the neighbouring park and its beautiful Butterfly Garden.

FRESH-ISH AIR...

For more animal attractions on Lennox's second birthday, we made the 40-minute drive out to Safari World. We spent most of our time at the amazing giraffe-feeding station. The raised platform was the best place to get up close and personal to hundreds of giant giraffes, their slimy blue tongues slurping our banana-gifts. Definitely a treat for the kids, if you don't object to football playing elephants, or chimps wearing jeans – but that's another story...

The city's main green space, Lumpini Park, is also a great place to run around early in the morning, before the heat sets in. A welcome green break from the city, kids will love the swan-shaped boats on the lake, or playing at one of several colourful playgrounds.

STAYING IN...

On the muggiest days, or those with torrential tropical downpours, staying indoors can be a blessing. The city's big malls are surprisingly great sources of entertainment. Traffic-free and air-conditioned, kids can roam free, admiring the water features, the oversized décor and



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make the most of the food courts, which offer everything from a fabulous selection of Asian foods, noodles and other mysteries, as well as Krispy Kreme Doughnuts and acres of tempting colourful cakes and sweets.

At Siam Paragon, the amazing Ocean World Aquarium in the basement is a fascinating experience. Well-worth the hefty entry fee, we were utterly bewitched by the never-ending exhibits, including everything from teeny tiny seahorses to the impressive sharks and sweeping rainbows of fish.

Bigger kids will also love the mall's top floor, home to a bowling alley, a cinema and Kidzania, a fabulous 'mini world' where kids can play doctors, pilots or car-mechanics – the ultimate in dress-up and make believe.

One of Lennox's favourite outings was to Kidzooona: a huge softplay fun-zone that might be every parent's nightmare but is clearly paradise for kids. Located at the Gateway mall, which specialises in Asian goodies, it's a great place to pick up sushi for dinner too. Ideal for toddlers, our happy two-year-old spent hours falling about the ball pools, whizzing down the slides and playing with moving child 'life-size' cranes.

With space at a premium, a shortage of toys can be an issue. We solved this drought by visiting kids clubs, such as the lovely Mandarin Oriental's, where Lennox and I were bowled over by the lovely staff, choice of toys and activities available. Had we stayed here, we might well have seen nothing of Bangkok, staying put all day! 