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Chinese New Year itinerary - Friday

Bangkok, 1 Day

Table of contents:

Itinerary Overview 2

Daily Itineraries 3

Bangkok Snapshot 6

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Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Bangkok

DAY NOTE: So we meet at Hua Lumphoung MRT station (take the Exit for Bangkok Center Hotel - Exit 2 I think). We take a tuktuk to the flower market and the pier there to cross the Chao Phraya for Wat Kalayanamit. Back across to meet Peung around 5. Maybe visit Wat Traimit (good place to meet Peung). Then attend festivities in Chinatown. Head out for Thip Samai for pad thai or alternative. Then to Silom Road for O'Reilly's and The Beatles show.

Chinatown (Yaowarat)
See (and taste) the Chinese influence on Bangkok

Pak Khlong Talat (Flower Market)
A night market bursting with colors of fresh flowers

Wat Kalayanamit Woramahavihara
Giant Golden Seated Buddha Across the Chao Phraya River

Wat Traimit (Golden Buddha)
A solid gold Buddha weighs 5 and a half tons

Thip Samai Pad Thai (Pad Thai Pratoopee)
Best Pad Thai in Bangkok

O'Reillys Irish Pub
Silom's rustic Irish pub

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Day 1 - Bangkok

QUICK NOTE

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contact:
tel: +66 02 694 1222 (Tourism Authority of Thailand)
fax: +66 02 694 1220 1
http://www.tat.or.th

location:
Yaowarat Road
Bangkok Bangkok 10110

1 Chinatown (Yaowarat)

Kevin Revolinski

DESCRIPTION: Chinese immigrants -- first under the benevolence of King Rama I and then after several other kings -- settled in Bangkok in Sampheng near the Grand Palace. The community quickly became a thriving business center and in the next century moved to Yaowarat, the current location of Bangkok's Chinatown. Rice trading brought great prosperity and by the 1950s Bangkok's business and entertainment center was Chinatown. Today shops, stalls, and of course Chinese restaurants line the streets and alleys centered around Yaowarat Road which lights up with neon at night like a miniature version of Hong Kong. Some of the major sights to see include the Golden Buddha at Wat Traimit and the Yaowarat Chinatown Heritage Center. But the most popular reason to go here is the food. Many eateries stay open long into the night or even 24 hours.
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location:
Chak Phet Street
Bangkok

2 Pak Khlong Talat (Flower Market)

Kevin Revolinski

DESCRIPTION: Pak Klong Talat or Pak Khlong Talad is the largest fresh flower market in Bangkok. Most of the flowers in Bangkok that you see in stores or along sidewalk vendors pass through this wholesale market not far from the Memorial Bridge on the Chao Phraya River. It is open round the clock, but it is best to wait until at least 5 pm. The real activity starts when the sun and temperatures go down and the shipments start coming in around 2 a.m. Never mind the "wholesale" label, individual bouquets are also on offer and all the roses and orchids and lilies you can imagine create narrow paths along the sidewalks and spill off the curbs into the street.
By river taxi, stop off at Pier 6 - Saphan Phut (Memorial Bridge) and walk or hire a tuk-tuk (don't pay more than 60 baht). Buses 3, 8, 42, 53, 73 pass directly through the market. This is one of those places where the bus stop is just about on the center line of the road. Photographers of course love the colors and the lighted vendors.
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contact:
tel: +66 2 466 4643

location:
371 Soi Wat Kalaya,Thanon Tetsaban Sai 1
Bangkok 10600

3 Wat Kalayanamit Woramahavihara

Kevin Revolinski

DESCRIPTION: Wat Kalayanmit Woramahavihara is easily visible from the Chao Phraya River as it has a huge vihaan (worship room) built to house the 49-foot (15-meter) high gold statue of a seated Buddha. Also in the temple grounds are the biggest bronze bell in Thailand and an old stone pagoda from China. The courtyard also has many statues that were brought to Thailand as ballast in empty Chinese rice junks. Founded by a Chinese nobleman who donated the land for the temple in the early 19th Century, this Wat is popular with the Thai-Chinese community. Access by cross river ferry from Tha Rajinee (No.7) or walk across Memorial Bridge from Tha Saphan Phut (No.6). - AH © wcities.com

contact:
tel: +66 (0) 2 623 3329 - 30
fax: +66 (0) 2 623 1372 - 3
http://www.wattraimitr-withayaram.com/new_t/index_home.php

location:
Traimit Road
Bangkok Bangkok 10100

hours:
Daily 9am-5pm

4 Wat Traimit (Golden Buddha)

Kevin Revolinski

DESCRIPTION: It's not every day you get to see a World Record worthy of the Guinness Book. Known in Thai as Phra Buddha Maha Suwanna Patimakorn, the Golden Buddha weighs 5.5 tons making it the world's most valuable (money-wise) sacred object. Amazingly the 13th century Sukothai-style statue spent centuries hidden under a layer of lacquered plaster which King Rama III ordered to disguise it when he moved it to Bangkok. An accidental crack in 1955 revealed the solid gold interior. The three-meter tall statue in the Subduing Mara, Calling the Earth to Witness posture occupies the fourth level of a somewhat pyramid-like shrine inside Wat Traimit. Entry to the temple is free and it is open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. However, for foreigners there is a 40-baht fee to see the massive gold Buddha image. On the third floor is an exhibit telling the history of the statue and its move to Bangkok.
The second floor is home to the Yaowarat Chinatown Heritage Center. Both exhibits are closed Mondays but otherwise follow the hours of the temple. Wat Traimit and the Golden Buddha should be the first stop on an exploration of Bangkok's Chinatown.
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MY NOTE: Also check out the giant swing at

contact:
tel: 02-221-6280
http://www.thipsamai.com/

location:
313 Mahachai Road, Phra Nakorn
Bangkok 10200

hours:
5:30 p.m. - 1:30 a.m. daily

5 Thip Samai Pad Thai (Pad Thai Pratoopee)

Kevin Revolinski

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:
Even if you think you don't like pad thai, this place makes it worth giving it another chance.

DESCRIPTION: As the name of the restaurant is written in Thai, it probably won't matter that this superb pad thai joint isn't commonly known by the name on the building: Thip Samai. Most locals will refer to it as Pad Thai Pratoopee which means

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"Door of the Ghost." Fortunately the street number is clearly on the red sign above the open storefront. With an opening date of 1966 you can figure the secret of success for this long running business is the quality. Call it Thip Samai or Pratoopee, the menu is the same: pad thai, the famous wok-fried rice noodle dish typically mixed with egg, dried shrimps, tofu, bean sprouts, garlic, palm sugar, fish sauce, tamarind and lime juice and fresh prawns as well. Ground peanuts are also often added (so allergy sufferers take note of your order). The whole thing can be wrapped in a thin omelet. To keep up with the orders, three cooks, each with his or her own big wok, are whipping up oversize batches of pad thai and sharing two big burners and dividing them out on plates as quickly as possible. The odd man out takes a break to clean the wok until one of the burners opens up. It's worth standing by to watch them work their magic a bit before you go to your table (or after eating). The prawns are good sized and fresh. One of the more expensive dishes (still well under 200 baht) adds a nice pile of crab meat on top. Orders can be altered to taste though that might increase the wait. This place is always busy and cars will pull up to the curb for to-go orders.
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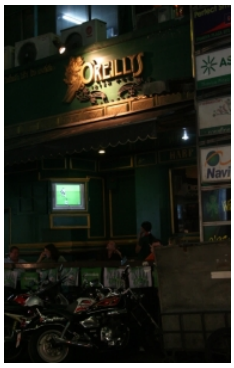
contact:
tel: 66 2 632 7515
fax: 66 2 235 1572

location:
62/1-4 Silom Road
Bangkok 10500

hours:
11a-2a M-Su

6 O'Reillys Irish Pub

DESCRIPTION: In search of some good old Irish craic and a pint of rich Irish stout? Then look no further. Inside the two levels are several bars, with comfortable and intimate booths, plus table seating-all done in the usual Irish theme of wood, wood, and more wood, backed up by all the pre-requisite pub paraphernalia. There is live music on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays to keep patrons entertained. An extensive menu includes set lunches, snacks and the usual Western pub fare. The selection of alcoholic drinks is generous, with Guinness (of course), Kilkenny's and a wide variety of whiskeys available. © wcities.com



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Bangkok Snapshot

Local Info

To put it simply, Bangkok can seem like a labyrinth to new arrivals in the city. The sprawling expressways and overpasses, huge new Skytrain and crowded streets full of vendors give the place a distinct Blade Runner-esque feel. Causing even further confusion is the lack of a true"center" to the city, with various districts scattered throughout town. On the positive side, the Skytrain has made it much easier to get around, and taxis,tuk-tuks, buses and motorcycle taxis are plentiful. Get your bearings by reading the following guide and it will not take long for you to be seduced by the glorious chaos and charm of the"City of Angels."

Phra Nakorn

The most heavily visited area, at least during the day, is Ko Rattanakosin(Rattanakosin Island), Bangkok's old city on the eastern bank of the Chao Phraya River. Here you will find fantastic examples of historical architecture such as the glittering Grand Palace, Wat Phra Keo, Wat Pho, Wat Mahathat, the Golden Mount and Wat Suthat. The city's founding pillar, Lak Mueang, is also located in this district, as are the National Museum, National Theater and National Gallery. If you are keen on seeing something completely out of the ordinary, pop across the river to the Museum of the Department of Forensic Medicine. Sanam Luang is about the only green spot on the"island," which is not really an island but would have seemed like one in the old days before the many canals linking the area to the river had not yet been filled in.

Thonburi

Bangkok was once referred to as"The Venice of the East," but today theklongs, or canals, are concentrated in Thonburi, an area lying to the west of the Chao Phraya River. You can take aklong tour, typical stops include Wat Arun and the museum of the Royal Barges. Buses heading south from Bangkok leave from Sai Tai bus terminal, located here.

Banglampoo& Thewet

Backpackers head for the Banglampoo and Thewet districts. Near the Democracy Monument on Khao San Road you can find some good souvenir shopping. This strip is lined with guest houses and cheap restaurants, none of which stand out for their ambiance or cuisine. A mere stone's throw away along Phra Arthit Road, some great restaurants and bars come to life at night. Following the eastern bank of the Chao Phraya, you will come to an area with a laid-back, cosmopolitan feel that is frequented by students from the nearby universities of Thammasat and Silpakorn.

Dusit

The Dusit district offers plenty of tourist attractions. Vimanmek Palace, Wat Benchamabophit, Suan Pakkard Palace and Dusit Zoo are all found here. There is not much in the way of hotels or restaurants, but a small artsy area popular with local students has sprung up on Rachawithee Soi 34.

Phayathai/Chatuchak

Northern Bangkok's touristic highlight is Chatuchak Weekend Market, best reached by catching the Skytrain. Mor Chit bus terminal is located near the same stop, which is handy to know if you want to catch an inter-provincial bus heading north or northeast. This is also a major transport hub, with the Skytrain and plenty of buses passing through. Mah Boon Krong is the largest shopping center in the district, and serves as a local transit hub and good orientation point.

Pathumwan

Young Thais and keen shoppers head for the area around Siam Square, a shopping paradise- unless you are a tall Western woman looking for off-the-rack clothes or shoes. The huge array of dining options along this stretch include Auberge Daband and the Erawan Tea Room.

There is plenty of selection in malls such as Siam Center and Siam Discovery Center, Centerpoint(the most popular teenage hangout), and the World Trade Center. A walk away from the latter stands Panthip Plaza, also known as heaven for computer geeks, and possibly the best place to get deals on computers in Southeast Asia. The non-shopper can retreat to the sanctuary of Jim Thompson's House and Museum. There is a cluster of hotels in this area, and popular restaurants such as the Hard Rock Café are also found here. Heading east along Ploenchit Road and Sukhumvit Road, you can orchestrate a shopping extravaganza at either the street stalls that spring up at the beginning of Sukhumvit and stretch to Soi Asoke or at department stores such as Central Chidlom.

Sathorn/Silom/Bangrak

The Sathorn/Silom area forms the core of Bangkok's Central Business District, although the Stock Exchange of Thailand is located some distance away on Ratchadaphisek Road. The area encompasses a number of embassies and hotels, such as the Banyan Tree, Sukhothai and Dusit Thani. Silom Road offers more shopping opportunities, including the Patpong Night Market. Sri Maha Uma Devi Temple is also located in this district. Restaurants abound, particularly around Convent Road. Head for nearby Lumpini Park for a break in a rare patch of green.

If you head west along Sathorn or Silom Road, you will come to Charoen Krung("New") Road and back to the Chao Phraya River. A tram used to run along this road, but these days hardly anything does- the traffic is too thick! This is another popular hotel area, with such luxurious hotels as The Oriental, The Peninsula, the Shangri-La, the Royal Orchid Sheraton and the Marriott Spa Resort all overlooking the river. Take a sunset cruise or dine in one of the many restaurants along the majestic river, such as Yok Yor Marina and Restaurant. The River City Shopping Complex sells a huge array of antiques and is worth a browse.

Chinatown& Pahurat

North along the river lies hectic Chinatown and Pahurat, an Indian district. Here you will find Wat Traimit, but the area is best

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known for its shopping. Yaowarat Road has loads of gold shops, while Sampeng Lane has everything from hair accessories to shoes, all at bargain prices. Farther north you will come to Pak Klong Talat with its colorful fresh flowers.

Outside the City

There are also a number of attractions to be found in the outlying areas of Bangkok and adjacent provinces, including King Rama IX Royal Park, Nonthaburi, the Ancient City, Damnoen Saduak Floating Market and Ayutthaya, a trip to which usually incorporates a visit to Bang Pa-In Summer Palace.
©

History

In just over 200 years, Bangkok has grown from a small collection of villages scattered among canals and rice paddies alongside the Chao Phraya River to an enormous sprawl of a capital. Extending upward and outward to become Thailand's dominant city, Bangkok mirrors the long, continuing reign of the Chakri dynasty that founded it. The seeds of this growth were sown back in 1767 when invading Burmese armies razed the old capital of Ayutthaya by tearing down its temples. Those that survived, including the royal family, were carted off as slaves. Out of this chaos, a Thai general named Phraya Thaksin founded a new capital at Thonburi on the western bank of the Chao Phraya River, opposite modern Bangkok, proclaimed himself king and immediately set about recapturing much of the surrounding country. One of the few surviving legacies from this period is Wat Arun, or"Temple of the Dawn." It has since been enlarged and reconstructed, but was originally part of Thaksin's royal temple.

Following his military successes, Thaksin became more and more excessive in his behavior and was finally ousted in a coup that transferred power to another general, Chao Phraya Chakri. Chakri kicked off the modern history of Bangkok by transferring the capital from Thonburi to the eastern bank of the river, founding Bangkok in 1782 on the fortified island of Ratanakosin. Chakri refurbished many of the existing temples in the area, such as Wat Po, and built present-day tourist sites, including Wat Phra Kaew, the Grand Palace and Lak Mueang, the shrine dedicated to the guardian deity of Bangkok. The National Museum, built originally for Chakri's vizier Prince Wang Na, also dates from this period.

Under Chakri and his successors, Bangkok continued to expand, mainly because of trade. New communities such as Yaowarat(mainly Chinese traders) and Pahurat(the Indian quarter) were established, extending outward from Ratanakosin. The third king in the Chakri dynasty, Phra Nang Klao, developed a new system of royal titles, naming himself Rama III and his predecessors Rama I and Rama II. Rama III was responsible for expanding Wat Pho and Wat Arun to their present form and also initiated the aborted construction of Wat Saket, the spectacular Golden Mount Temple, completed further down the line by Rama V.

Rama IV, also known as Mongkut, is probably best known by Westerners as the ruler inThe King and I and the more recentAnna and the King. Thais tend to find these interpretations offensive and growing evidence now suggests the accounts of Anna Leonowens, on which the movies were based, to be pure fiction at best. The real Rama IV was a brilliant leader who skillfully negotiated treaties with foreign powers that prevented the colonization of Thailand. Under his reign, Bangkok benefited from his trade policies with an expanded port and, for the first time, paved streets.

Rama V(also known as Chulalongkorn or"The Great King") took on the throne in 1868 at the age of 15 and continued his father's reforms, setting down the foundations for the modern Thai government as well as moving the royal palace to Dusit and building Bangkok's first railway system. The grounds of his old Chitlada Palace feature the Vimanmek Teak Mansion and the Abhisek Throne Hall, both excellent examples of royal Thai architecture. During this time, both the Victory Monument and Democracy Monument were constructed to designs by Corrado Feroci, an Italian credited with helping found Thailand's modern art movement. Rama V's long reign brought peace and stability to Thailand and his death in 1910 ushered in a period of great change. The first in a long series of coups was launched unsuccessfully in 1912 by a group of disgruntled soldiers. Another coup in 1932 by Western-educated students proved more successful, ending the absolute monarchy and replacing it with a constitutional model.

Rama VII abdicated in 1935, leaving the 10-year-old Rama VIII in his place. Power passed into the hands of Field Marshall Phibun, the first in what would prove to be a long line of military dictators. Probably one of the best examples of 1930s architecture is the Neilson Hays Library in downtown Bangkok. Phibun allied with the Japanese during World War II, sparing the capital from destruction, but lost his position of absolute power to a democratic civilian government after the war. He regained absolute power under murky circumstances surrounding the death of Rama VIII.

The current King Bhumibol(Rama IX) was crowned in 1946, and the first few decades of his reign were marked by the rise of communism in Indochina, leading to growing American military aid and a continuing succession of military dictators. The enduring legacy in Bangkok of this time are the bars of Patpong and Soi Cowboy, which catered to American soldiers on R& R from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Another reminder of this turbulent time is Jim Thompson's House and Museum, preserved exactly as the silk magnate left it when he mysteriously disappeared.

In 1973, massive student demonstrations forced General Thanom, the military ruler, to leave the country. A civilian government took over, but lasted only until 1976, when more student demonstrations against the return of Thanom were brutally crushed by right-wing forces fearing a communist takeover. General Prem Tinsulanonda, a moderate, took power in 1980 and is credited for leading Thailand out of this

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mess, granting amnesty to the communists and overseeing a period of growth and stability that turned Bangkok into the vibrant modern capital it is today.

One downturn in this trend of liberalization has been another military coup in 1991, overthrown the following year by bloody Bangkok street demonstrations. Since then, a succession of four civilian governments has seen the capital enjoy a much more stable political climate. The only other crisis of note was the 1997 Asian economic meltdown, whose legacy is still apparent in scores of unfinished condominiums and office towers.

In 2006 amidst widespread protest and accusations of human rights abuses, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who came to power with the Thai Rak Thai Party in 2001, was removed in a bloodless coup, staged while he was out of the country. Political turmoil has continued to show itself in street demonstrations and most visibly with the blocking by protesters of aiport and transit links in late 2008.
©

Hotel Insights

Bangkok offers a wide variety of accommodations to suit every taste and budget. A visitor can live royally in an elegant five star hotel or stay comfortably in a guest house on a modest budget. Since many hotels are often fully booked during the peak season from November to March, it is recommended that visitors make advance reservations if they plan to visit during this time.

The main hotel districts are around Siam Square and Ploenchit Road, next to the Chao Phraya River, along Silom Road and Suriwong Road, and along Sukhumvit Road. There are other areas such as Banglampoo where backpackers favor inexpensive guesthouses. More inexpensive accommodation is available across the river where some modern high-rise hotels are planned and in Chinatown, which is one of the most vibrant and typically Asian parts of Bangkok.

Siam Square& Ploenchit Road

In the area around Siam Square, you will find some very nice places to stay, along with a whole variety of shops, restaurants and nightspots. The less expensive places are concentrated on Soi Kasemann 1 and near Jim Thompson's House and Museum. These places, such as Wendy House, offer a guesthouse atmosphere with hotel comfort.

In a quiet enclave opposite Siam Square stands an elegant low-rise modern Thai building, the classy five-star Siam InterContinental. Another nearby luxury hotel is the Amari Watergate Hotel, near the World Trade Center. The Grand President Bangkok is a 30-year-old landmark aimed primarily at business travelers. Next to the Erawan Shrine and across from the Central World Plaza, you will find the Grand Hyatt Erawan, another stylish five-star hotel. Reputation precedes itself at Four Seasons Bangkok while less expensive accommodation can be found at the well known Indra Regent and Bangkok Palace.

Chao Phraya River, Silom Road& Suriwong Road

This district encompasses some of the older sections of Bangkok. The area around Silom Road and Suriwong Road is considered the financial district, and has a number of hotels and restaurants not far from the Patpong Night Market with its easy shopping and entertainment. For a centrally located top-class hotel geared for both business and leisure, try the Dusit Thani on the corner of Silom Road. Then there are two luxury establishments, the Montien Bangkok features a distinctly Thai character, and the Sukhothai, which boasts an elegant decor inspired by the walled city of Sukhothai.

Continue farther west, and you will reach the riverbank, where some of the leading hotels in Bangkok are to be found. The Royal Orchid Sheraton offers riverfront luxury oriented toward tour groups. For decades, the Shangri-La has claimed to be Bangkok's finest hotel, though there are now many others in its class. The Oriental, another stylish riverside hotel, is often voted as one of the world's top hotels. The Peninsula and Marriott Spa Resort are two other plush hotels overlooking the Chao Praya River.

Sukhumvit Road

This is another area well known for shops and nightspots, including the seamy bars of Soi Nana and Soi Cowboy. There are some mid-range hotels and inns here, including the Atlanta Hotel and the Bangkok Inn, but the better four-star and five-star hotels tend to be more oriented toward business travelers than tourists. However, what they may lack in character is made up for in facilities. The brand-new JW Marriott Bangkok is a deluxe hotel geared toward business travelers and boasts one of the most modern fitness centers in the city. The Landmark and the Westin Grande Sukhumvit are two of the most luxurious hotels on Sukhumvit, while the Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit is an old mainstay with business travelers. Novotel Lotus caters to business clientele. For modern-sized, unpretentious topnotch accommodation, try the Amari Boulevard, where all the rooms have nice views of the Bangkok skyline. More budget oriented options can be found at Zenith Hotel and the Danish style Stable Lodge.

Wherever you decide to stay in Bangkok, the friendly people here in the"Land of Smiles" will make it easy to relax and enjoy your time in this hospitable city.
©

Restaurants Insights

Thai cuisine has spread across the globe in the past three decades at an unprecedented speed. The reason is not hard to fathom-- the food is absolutely delicious. There are two types of Thai cooking: royal Thai cuisine and"common" fare. The former is traditionally served to royalty, and usually garnished with exquisitely carved fruits and vegetables."Common" Thai food is what Thais eat every day. Each of the four regions in Thailand has a distinct cuisine, but unless you are dining in a restaurant specializing in regional cooking, you are

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likely to find a blend of cuisines on most menus.

In the central region, the food is known for being hot, salty, sweet and sour. Dishes such asnam phrik(dips) and soups served with boiled rice are standard fare. In the northeastern region, sticky rice is the staple accompaniment to such popular dishes assom tam(green papaya salad),gai yang(barbecued chicken) andlaap(salads of meat and fresh herbs). Much of the street food in Bangkok is from the northeast, due to the large number of vendors coming from the region. Food from the north tends to be mild, salty and sour, but not sweet. Fermented sour pork sausages(you can see them being barbecued on the street) are a favorite. In the south, fish and sour curries(without coconut milk) are the normal diet.

Phra Nakorn

There are plenty of restaurants in this district where you will find the best in Thai cuisine. Phranakorn Bar& Gallery has a popular rooftop bar where the drinks are reasonably-priced. Be sure to try an authentic Thai whiskey and enjoy the local, contemporary music playing in the background. The restaurant Thiptara built on the Chao Praya River has been made to resemble a traditional Thai compound. Rim Nam Terrace can be found within the Royal River Hotel, and serves local Thai cuisine in a modern dining room. The tiny and ancient Chote Chitr has been turning out court style food for over 90 years while the Brick Bar serves up beer and satisfying Thai snacks.

Thonburi

On the other hand, if it is international cuisine you are hungry for, Bangkok will satisfy you all the same. From Indian to Greek, Middle Eastern and Latin — name your cuisine and somewhere there will be a waiter ready with an appropriate menu. Sample Pacific Rim offerings at Jesters or riverfront Supatra House. Enjoy Cantonese favorites at Mei Jiang. Trader Vics Polynesian bar in Bangkok is always ready to welcome the wayfaring traveler.

Sathorn/Silom/Bangrak

If you're in the mood for fresh seafood, try Harmonique, where the menu is Thai and the main ingredient is fish. Good places to start your Thai culinary adventure include Baan Khanitha, where the food is a favorite of locals and visitors alike. Large hotels usually have excellent Thai restaurants, among them the Celadon. While European restaurants are relatively new on the scene, there has been a recent boom in Italian cuisine, with oldies such as Angelini's attracting huge crowds. Several French restaurants have also opened to rave reviews, one of the best is Le Café Siam. Coffee is enjoying a boom in Bangkok, and although Starbucks may now be everywhere, other chains like Au Bon Pain are springing up with great success.

Then there are the"international" restaurants serving Asian and Italian-inspired dishes, but which refuse to be easily pigeonholed: Eat Me and Indigo are just two that defy labels. Bangkok's pubs and bars are up there with the best, although it is worth noting that steep taxes on wine push even basic table vino into the expensive bracket. At its very core, Bangkok is a beer-and-whiskey town. In many establishments you can order a bottle of whiskey which will be kept for your next visit. There are a number of micro-breweries to keep ale lovers happy and plenty of bars for spirit sippers, such as the more upmarket Barbican.

Pathumwan

Then there are the pubs where live bands play popular Thai songs and, at some stage in the evening, the ubiquitousHotel California. Henry J Bean's is just such a pub. Note that pubs and bars in Bangkok serve delectable food, making an evening of bar-hopping a fine way to pass the time. Try the area around Phra Arthit Road or Narathiwat Soi 15.

Bangkok is dotted with literally hundreds of eateries and nightspots. Do not be afraid to be adventurous because it is difficult to find a bad meal in the"City of Angels." In fact, dining and drinking will most likely become one of the highlights of your trip here. ©

Nightlife Insights

Bangkok is a city of endless diversity, where boredom is never an option. There is a whole lot more to Bangkok than its already legendary nightlife.

Traditional Thai Dance& Drama, Contemporary Theater& Cabaret

For something a little more cultural, Bangkok features some excellent examples of traditional Thai dance and drama. Known askhon, these performances involve masked actors portraying heroes, heroines, monkeys and demons from theRamakian(the Thai version of the HinduRamayana). Two of the best places to seekhon are the National Theatre and the Chaloem Krung Royal Theatre. In addition, there are many dinner theaters catering largely to tourists, where admission includes dinner and the show. Sala Rim Naam, which is run by the Oriental Hotel, features one of the more extravagant settings of any dinner theater. Others worth visiting are Baan Thai and Maneeya Lotus Room.Lakhon kae bon, akhon variant, can be seen free of charge at the Erawan Shrine and Lak Mueang. These performances are commissioned by worshipers whose wishes have been granted by the deities of these busy city shrines.

Also of interest for the theatrically inclined, the Bangkok Playhouse serves as a regular venue for contemporary Thai theater and performance art. Lastly, there are at least two big tourist-friendly transvestite cabaret shows worth seeing— Calypso Cabaret at the Asia Hotel, which is the most famous and possibly the best, and Mambo Cabaret on Sukhumvit Road, a newcomer already packed with tourists. A new take on nightlife can be found at Twisted Republic.

Thai Boxing

Culture of another sort, though no less incredible, the national sport ofmuay thai is better known overseas as Thai kick-

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boxing. Two major stadiums and many smaller ones scattered around Bangkok offer ample opportunities to seemuay thai, complete with all its ritual rappings. Lumpini and Ratchadamnoen feature some of the best fighters in the country, with matches alternating between the two stadiums over the course of a week. Apart from the action in the ring, added entertainment is provided by the musical accompaniment played by a traditional ensemble centered around thepii, or Thai oboe, plus the sight of the big, rowdy crowd betting away.

Cinema

Bangkok has been recently hit by the multiplex revolution. Almost every big shopping mall has an attached cineplex showing the latest Hollywood blockbusters as well as some Thai and Thai-dubbed Hong Kong films. In addition, Bangkok hosts at least three big film festivals a year, while the cultural centers of the French, German and Japanese embassies show selected films once a week. Some of Bangkok's better cinemas include United Artists at the Emporium, Major Multiplex at the Central World Plaza and Lido Multiplex in the heart of Siam Square.

Theme Parks

Whether or not you are traveling with children, there are several big theme parks on the outskirts of Bangkok worth visiting. Dream World, features rides that are a big hit with the kids. If you prefer to cool down, Siam Water Park will do just fine. With an enormous wave pool, lots of water slides, whirlpools and other forms of aquatic chaos, it gets crowded with families seeking to escape the heat on the weekends. At Safari World, a drive-through wildlife park, you can observe a teeming array of animals through the windows of your car or tour bus.

Museums, Galleries& Libraries

Bangkok's many museums, galleries and libraries present an oasis of solitude in an otherwise hectic city. The National Museum displays Thailand's cultural treasures, and offers excellent guided tours. On the gallery front, while the National Gallery will certainly interest pure art fans, there is a surge in gallery and bar combinations. This is best typified by About Studio/Café, which succeeds admirably in presenting art in more relaxed surroundings. The Neilson Hayes Library in downtown Bangkok houses what is possibly Bangkok's best collection of English literature in a stunning 1930s era building. A visit to Bangkok Children's Discovery Museum will please any child. Explore traditional Thai culture at the Kamthieng House or Vimanmek Museum. The National Science Museum has rotating hands-on exhibits.

Massage/Meditation

If all this activity leaves you completely drained, what better way is there to revive your spirits than with a traditional Thai massage? Nowadays, particularly in tourist areas, there is a plethora of reflexology and massage parlors, but you probably get the best value for your money at Wat Pho, Bangkok's oldest Buddhist temple. Meditation courses also represent a good way to experience a different side of Bangkok. For non-Thai speakers, Wat Mahathat and Wat Pak Nam, both of which have many foreign students, are probably the best places to visit.
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Things to Do Insights

Bangkok may seem a bit overwhelming at first, with so much to see and do, but once you get used to all the traffic and confusing geography be ready to experience the time of your life.

Unlike many other cities around the world where you immediately feel a sense of awe and wonder, Bangkok's contrasts might require an adjustment when first arriving. However, it is certainly worth exploring this amazing capital. There are a number of areas inside and outside the city where an abundance of sights and attractions can be visited on a day tour.

Grand Palace

The most famous of Bangkok's sights, the Grand Palace is a square mile of royal white buildings surrounded by white walls. Within the complex is Wat Phra Kaew, which contains the Emerald Buddha. To gain an overview of Thai history and art, go to the nearby National Museum, which offers free guided tours in English. Not far south from the Grand Palace is Bangkok's oldest and largest temple, Wat Pho, famous for its enormous Reclining Buddha and its school of traditional Thai massage. Dip through the Pak Klong Talat fruit and flower market on your way to nearby Wat Mahathat, the most important place of Buddhist learning in Southeast Asia. Finish up your day on the rooftop of the Phranakorn Bar& Gallery with a refreshing drink and a curry.

Democracy Monument

Near the Democracy Monument, which forms the centerpiece of a roundabout, you will find a variety of important and interesting temples. Wat Sa Ket may look undistinguished, but from the top of this"Golden Mount," you can enjoy some truly stunning views of the city. Built by Rama V, the unusual Chinese-influenced design of Wat Ratchabophit makes it one of the city's prettiest temples. Wat Indravihara, is worth visiting for a glimpse of the towering 32-meter-high Standing Buddha. Nearby is the spacious, leafy area of Dusit, a royal district since the reign of Rama V. The last major temple built in Bangkok, Wat Benchamabophit incorporates an intriguing mix of classical Thai and 19th century European design and is often referred to as the"Marble Temple" because of its Carrara marble walls. The Dusit Zoo, set in a beautiful park, houses some rare animals, including the Komodo dragon, the world's largest reptile. The elegant National Library is also in this area, alongside a smaller library built as a tribute to the present King, Rama IX. Not far away is the backpackers' hangout, Banglampoo, where you can do some shopping and have a bite to eat in a number of good restaurants, including the Sidewalk Café.

Chinatown

The markets, shops and remnants of old-style architecture make Chinatown interesting for tourists. Check out the China House, located at the Oriental Hotel, for fine dining, or the Bamboo Bar for live jazz

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and drinks. There are also some interesting temples in the area. Wat Chakrawat, which overlooks the Chao Phraya River, is home to several crocodiles and monkeys. Wat Ga Buang Kim is a typical neighborhood temple where local residents socialize and the occasional worshiper drops by. Inside Wat Traimit, you will find the world's biggest solid-gold Buddha, which is more than three meters tall and weighs five and a half tons. Stop in at Thai Nakon Intimex to admire the traditional craft of nielloware, or metalwork. Although Bangkok is generally a very safe city, this is one area that can be dangerous for tourists at night.

Thonburi

Thonburi became linked to central Bangkok by the construction of the Memorial Bridge in 1932, but it retained its separate identity until 1971. For an authentic Thai cuisine experience try the Blue Elephant, located in the historic Blue Elephant Cooking School. Beside the Memorial Bridge lies Wat Prayoon. This temple is worth visiting for its unusual collection of miniaturechedis or Thai Buddhist monuments and shrines. A popular way to see the sights in Thonburi is to embark on a canal tour by chartering a boat at Tha Chang, in front of the Grand Palace. A canal tour will take in one of Bangkok's most memorable landmarks, Wat Arun, also known as the"Temple of Dawn." Another highlight of a canal tour is the museum of the Royal Barges, where you will see a variety of fantastically ornamented boats used in ceremonial processions on the river. Stop in at Chao Phraya River Cultural Center to see how local crafts are made. You can purchase the ones you like, or come back in the evening to see one of their regularly held performances. If your visit falls on a Saturday or Sunday, head to the Taling Chan District Office, to buy fresh fruits and more at the Floating Market.

Lumpini Park

Bangkok's downtown area includes the main financial district around Silom Road, the green expanse of Lumpini Park and a number of shopping centers around Sukhumvit Road and Siam Square, including the Ma Bun Krong Center. Around Siam Square, you can have coffee at Au Bon Pain, then go on a tour of Jim Thompson's House and Museum nearby. After visiting the famous Erawan Shrine, you can go across the street and visit the fabulous Thai Craft Museum, followed by some duty-free shopping at the World Trade Center. At the Snake Farm, near the intersection of Rama I Road and Silom Road, you can see venom extracted from live snakes two times a day. A few blocks away lies the Patpong Night Market, which is also well known for its many neon-lit go-go bars.

Ayutthaya

There are a number of destinations outside Bangkok that are worth visiting. Ayutthaya, the ancient capital and a World Heritage Site, is situated 80 kilometers north of Bangkok. Kanchanaburi, best known as the location of the bridge over the River Kwai, is set in some limestone hills 120 kilometers(75 miles) to the northwest. Worth the trip is Damnoen Saduak Floating Market, 109 kilometers(68 miles) southwest of the capital. Here you will see canals crowded with paddle boats laden with fruits and vegetables.

After spending some time in Bangkok, the"City of Angels," you will see why many visitors keep coming back, some for business, some for holiday, and some to settle down.

Bus Tours

Thailand For You(+66 2671 0235/http://www.th4u.com/guide.htm/)

Walking Tours

Walking Tour of Bangkok(http://www.visit-thailand.info/special-features/walking-tour-of-bangkok.htm/)

Thailand For Visitors(http://thailandforvisitors.com/central/bangkok/ctown-tour.html/)

Bangkok Private Tours(http://www.bangkokprivatetours.com/bangkok_walk.html/)

Boat Tours

Bangkok River Cruise Tours(+66 2651 9501/http://www.bangkok.com/river-cruise-tours/index.html/)
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Travel Tips

Getting There

By Air

Most flights into Thailand touch down at the new Bangkok International Airport, which is located 15 miles east of downtown.

Bangkok International Airport(BKK)

+66 2 132 1888

http://www.bangkokairportonline.com/

Major airlines include:

Air Asia(+603 8660 4343/ http://www.airasia.com/)

Air China(+1 800 227 5118/ http://www.china-airlines.com/)

Air France(+1 800 871 1366/ http://www.airfrance.com/)

Air New Zealand(+1 800 663 5494/ http://www.airnz.com/)

American Airline(+1 800 433 7300/ http://www.aa.com/)

British Airways(+1 800 247 9297/ http://www.ba.com/)

Continental(+1 800 525 0280/ http://www.continental.com/)

El Al(+1 800 223 6700/ http://www.elal.co.il/)

Japan Airlines(+1 800 525 3663/http://www.japanair.com/)

Korean Air(+1 800 438 5000/ http://www.koreanair.com/)

Lufthansa(+1 800 645 3880/ http://www.lufthansa.com/)

Northwest(+1 800 225 2525/ http://www.nwa.com/)

Nippon(+1 888 422 7533/ http://www.ana.co.jp/)

Qantas(+1 604 279 6611/ http://www.qantas.com/)

United(+1 800 241 6522/ http://www.ual.com/)

From the Airport

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Bus:

Buses exit every 15 minutes from the airport and depending on the status of traffic can your ride into Bangkok can last one to two hours. Passengers can choose from four routes: A1: Silom Road Business District A2: Khao San Road A3: Sukhumvit Road and Central World Plaza A4: Hualampong Railway Station These express buses operate daily from 4:30a-12:30a, with a fare of THB150. Regular city buses also depart from the airport for around THB35; they can be reached by taking a shuttle bus to the airport bus terminal.

Train:

Express train service into downtown Bangkok can be found opposite the terminals and can be reached by the skybridge linking the two. Travel time is about 30 minutes.

Taxi:

Taxis are easy to find outside the airport's three terminals. Depending on traffic, rides generally last between 40-90 minutes. Fares usually cost THB240-THB320. Don't take offers from taxi drivers within the terminals. Go to an official taxi stand. The fare will be much cheaper. Make sure that the taximeter is running.

Car Rental:

Avis(+1 800 831 2847/ http://www.avis.com/)

Budget(+1 800 527 0700/ http://www.budget.com/)

Hertz(+1 800 654 3131/ http://www.hertz.com/)

By Train

State Railways of Thailand(+66 2 225 0300) services Bangkok from all four directions, including Malaysia from the south. Passengers disembark at the Hua Lampong Train Station(+66 2 223 3762), located on Rama IV Road. Taxis can easily be located outside the station.

By Bus

The Southern Bus Terminal(+66 2 435 1200) services buses arriving from such southern towns as Hua Hin and Phuket. The North/Northeastern Bus Terminal(+66 2 272 0296) caters to buses arriving from the north, including from Chiang Mai, near the Laos border and Lampang. The Eastern Bus Terminal:(+66 2 391 2504) harbors buses arriving from the southeast coast, including from the towns of Pattaya and Trad.

By Car

National Highway#4 jabs into Bangkok from the west and represents the main thoroughfare from Hua Hin. National Highway#3 arrives from a southeast direction, making Pattaya a three-hour drive. National Highways#32 and#117 vein into the city from the north.

Getting Around

Public Transport

The Bangkok Mass Transit System's Skytrain(+66 2 617 7300/ http://www.bts.co.th/) rates as the quickest and most efficient option for negotiating through the city. This elevated monorail features 25 stops spread over two lines. The Sukhumvit Line accesses such popular attractions as Siam Square and the Victory Monument. The Silom Line includes stops in the Silom business district and at the National Stadium. Stations are attended every three minutes during peak hours. The Skytrain operates daily from 6a-11:57p and all rides cost less than THB40.

The Bangkok Mass Transit Authority(+66 2 246 0973/ http://www.bmta.co.th/) operates a massive bus system that services Bangkok and beyond. All one-way fares cost less than THB20. Be aware that the buses are the main work areas for pickpocket artists and"purse slashers"(also known as"razors") that target tourists, so travel with caution. The system operates daily from 5a until 11p.

Tuk-Tuk

Three-wheeled, open sided vehicles called tuk-tuks dominate the streets to the point that they have come to symbolize downtown Bangkok. Despite their novelty, they are also ideally suited for short trips around the city(they possess the capacity for long, cross town hauls but the constant exposure to bus and truck exhaust fumes while endlessly idling in traffic tends to limit their appeal to three or four blocks). Drivers consider haggling a lofty human virtue so agree to a set price before entering. Rides generally cost between THB40-THB140.

Taxi, Motorcycle Taxi& Watertaxi

Taxis are easy to hail from the street and in front of the major hotels. Avoid fare rip-offs by only using cabs designated with clearly marked"taxi-meter" roof signs.

Motorcycle taxis are only recommended for those with sound health insurance. No helmets are provided and drivers weave in and out of traffic as if auditioning to be Hollywood stuntmen. Use only as a last option for short distances.

The Chao Phraya Express Company(+66 2 222 5330) provides water taxi service on the Chao Phraya River, hence the name. The comedic number of boats on the river makes it seem as if a Jackie Chan chase scene is about to whiz through at any second, yet this service still represents the quickest means for maneuvering through Bangkok in a north-south direction. Most riders board at the Siphya Pier, close to the Royal Orchid Sheraton.

Car

Driving in Bangkok offers obvious convenience, but also obvious risk. Road congestion is constant, locals exhibit the same cautionary driving skills as all-night revelers, and regardless of fault, foreigners are usually blamed in accidents. Keep in mind that seat belts are mandatory and driving is on the left.
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Fun Facts

Top 12 Interesting Facts About Bangkok

1. Bangkok is better known asKrung Thep by the Thai, but even that is a shortened name. The full name in Thai is Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahinthara Yuthaya Mahadilok Phop Noppharat Ratchathani Burirom Udomratchaniwet Mahasathan Amon Phiman Awatan Sathit Sakkathattiya

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Witsanukam Prasit. But who has time for that little fun fact? Bangkok it is.

2. Due to heavy(literally) development, Bangkok is sinking at a rate of 2-5 cm per year. This combined with rising sea levels may make the city a bit more Venice-like in the not-so-distant future.

3. Bangkok nicknames include Venice of the East and City of Angels.

4. Travel+ Leisure Magazine has rated Bangkok the Number One city in the world in both 2008 and 2010.(In 2010, Thailand's second cityChiang Mai took#2 in that ranking!)

5. Bangkok'sChatuchak Weekend Market(J.J. Market) is one of the largest markets in the world covering an area of 27 acres.

6. The wordsoi means side street and most major roads will have numbered sois along its length. You will also notice an abundance of stray dogs which many refer to as"soi dogs."

7. One interesting fact is that many Thai believe that leaving bottles of water along the front of a building will discourage soi dogs from urinating there. You can see shopfronts at the end of the day with a row of plastic water bottles on the sidewalk.

8. The popularErawan Shrine downtown was built to appease angered spirits that were causing delays and accidents during the construction of what is now theGrand Hyatt Erawan Hotel.

9. Every April Bangkok hosts the world's largest street water fight during the Thai New Year holiday known as the Songkran Festival.

10. Here's a random fact: the Guinness Book of World Records lists the stage at Bangkok'sSiam Niramit as the highest in the world.

11. Thailand was known as the Kingdom of Siam until the kingdom took its present name on June 23, 1939.

12. The 5.5-tonGolden Buddha at Wat Traimit in Bangkok is the not only the largest solid gold Buddha in the world, but also the most valuable(moneywise) religious object.

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