

Thailand **Bangkok & Around (Chapter)**

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Coverage includes: Bangkok, Around Bangkok covering Bangkok to Amphawa, Amphawa and Nakhon Pathom.

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Bangkok

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Why Go?

Formerly the epitome of the elderly Asian metropolis, in recent years Bangkok has gone under the knife and emerged as a rejuvenated starlet. Her wrinkles haven't totally been erased, but you might not notice them behind the ever-expanding public-transport system, air-conditioned megamalls and international-standard restaurants.

But don't take this to mean that there's no more 'real' Bangkok. The Royal Palace and Wat Phra Kaew still sparkle just as they did more than 200 years ago, and the BTS (Skytrain) has had little impact on the shophouses of Banglamphu or the canals of Thonburi. To really experience the Bangkok of today, it's necessary to explore both of these worlds. Take the MRT (Metro) to hectic Chinatown or the *klorng* boat to the chic Central World mall, and along the way we're certain you'll find that the old personality and that new face culminate in one sexy broad indeed.

When to Go

According to the World Meteorological Organisation, Bangkok is one of the hottest cities in the world. To make things worse, there's very little fluctuation in the temperature, and the average high sways between a stifling 32°C and an incrementally more stifling 34°C. The rainy season runs from approximately May to October, during when the city receives as much as 300mm of rain a month.

Virtually the only break from the relentless heat and humidity comes during Bangkok's winter, a few weeks of relative coolness in December/January.

History

The centre of government and culture in Thailand today, Bangkok was a historical miracle during a time of turmoil. Following the fall of Ayuthaya in 1767, the kingdom fractured into competing forces, from which General Taksin emerged as a decisive unifier. He established his base in Thonburi, on the western bank of Mae Nam Chao Phraya (Chao Phraya River), a convenient location for sea trade from the Gulf of Thailand. Taksin proved more of a military strategist than a popular ruler. He was later deposed by another important military general, Chao Phraya Chakri, who in 1782 moved the capital across the river to a more defensible location in anticipation of a Burmese attack. The succession of his son in 1809 established the present-day royal dynasty, and Chao Phraya Chakri is referred to as Rama I.

Court officials envisioned the new capital as a resurrected Ayuthaya, complete with an island district (Ko Ratanakosin) carved out of the swampland and cradling the royal court (the Grand Palace) and a temple to the auspicious Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Kaew). The emerging city, which was encircled by a thick wall, was filled with stilt and floating houses ideally adapted to seasonal flooding.

Modernity came to the capital in the late 19th century as European aesthetics and technologies filtered east. During the reigns of Rama IV (King Mongkut) and Rama V (King Chulalongkorn), Bangkok received its first paved road (Th Charoen Krung) and a new royal district (Dusit) styled after European palaces.

Bangkok was still a gangly town when soldiers from the American war in Vietnam came to rest and relax in the city's go-go bars and brothels. It wasn't until the boom years of the 1980s and '90s that Bangkok exploded into a fully fledged metropolis crowded with hulking skyscrapers and an endless spill of concrete that gobbled up rice paddies and green space. The city's extravagant tastes were soon tamed by the 1997 economic meltdown, the effects of which can still be seen in the numerous half-built skyscrapers.

Sights

In recent years Bangkok has yet again started to redefine itself, and projects such as the BTS (Skytrain) and MRT (Metro) have begun to address the city's notorious traffic problems, while simultaneously providing the city with a modern face. A spate of giant air-conditioned mega-malls has some parts of the city looking a lot like Singapore,

BANGKOK IN...

One Day

Get up as early as you can and take the **Chao Phraya Express** north to **Nonthaburi Market**. On your way back, hop off at Tha Chang to explore the museums and temples of **Ko Ratanakosin**, followed by **lunch in Banglamphu**.

After freshening up, get a new perspective on the city with sunset cocktails at one of the **rooftop bars**, followed by an upscale Thai dinner at **nahm**.

Two Days

Allow the **BTS** to whisk you to various **shopping** destinations and a visit to **Jim Thompson House**, punctuated by a **buffet lunch** at one of the city's hotels. Wrap up the day-light hours with a **traditional Thai massage**. Then work off those calories at the dance clubs of **RCA**.

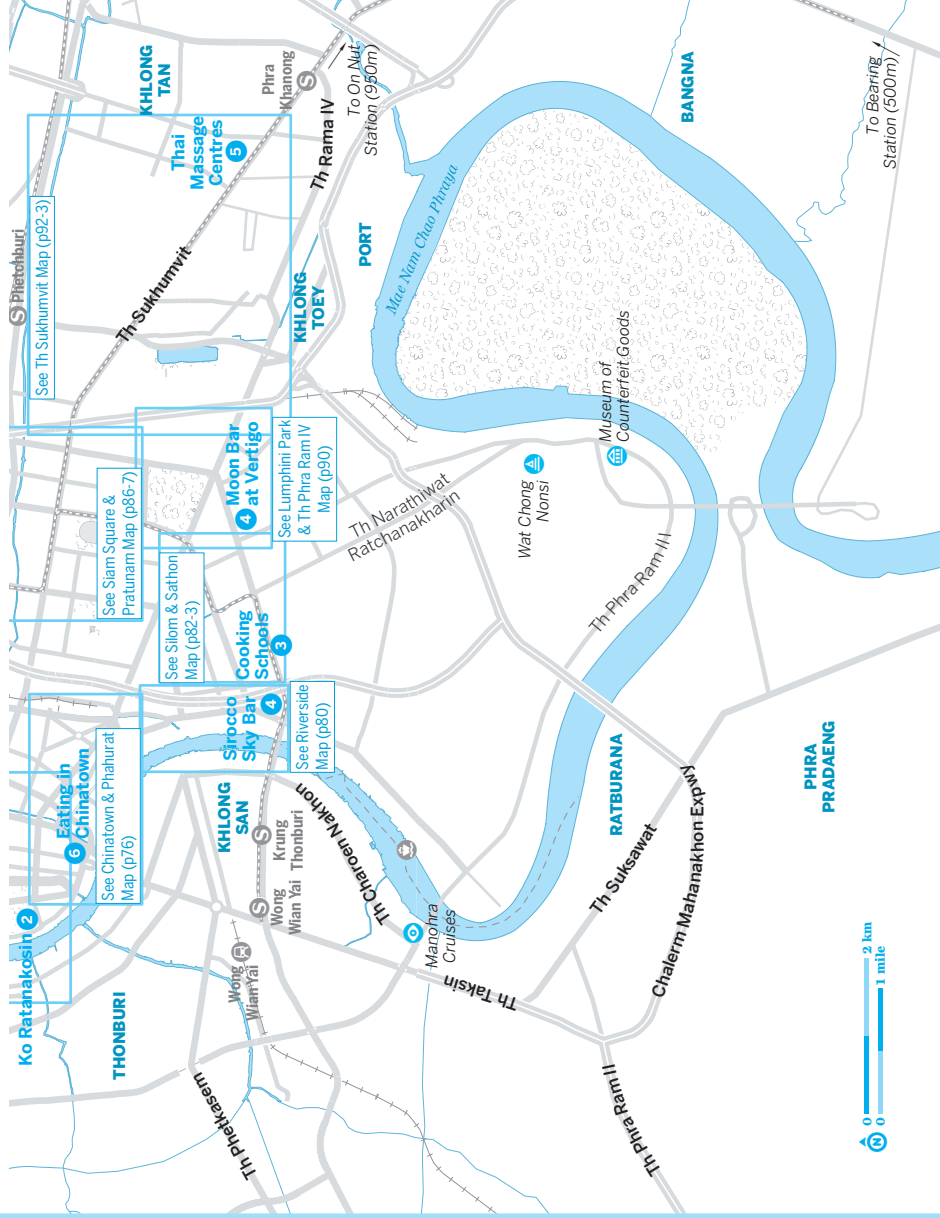
Three Days

Spend a day at **Chatuchak Weekend Market** or if it's a weekday, enrol in a **cooking school**. Now that you're accustomed to Bangkok's noise, pollution and traffic, you're ready for a **street-food dinner** in Chinatown.

Four Days

At this point you may be itching to get out of the city. Convenient escapes include **Ko Kret**, a car-less island north of Bangkok, or taking a long-tail boat to ride through **Thonburi's canals**.

- 6** Eating yourself into a stupor on the streets of **Chinatown** (p.123)
- 7** Getting out of the city and visiting the nearby canal-side town of **Amphawa** (p.153)



and despite recent bouts of political unrest, the general atmosphere is hectic but stable. It seems like only a matter of time before Bangkok's modernisation reaches the level of other leading Asian capitals.

KO RATANAKOSIN, BANGLAMPHU & THONBURI

เกาะรัตนโกสินทร์/บางลำพู/ธนบุรี

Welcome to Bangkok's birthplace. The vast city we know today emerged from Ko Ratanakosin, a tiny virtual island ('Ko') made by dredging a canal around Mae Nam Chao Phraya during the late 18th century. Within this area you'll find the glittering temples and palaces that most visitors associate with the city. Ko Ratanakosin's riverfront setting is also home to several museums, markets and universities. All these sights are within walking distance of each other and are best visited early in the morning before the day comes to a boil.

Adjacent Banglamphu suffers from an extreme case of bipolar disorder, encompassing both the most characteristically old-school-Bangkok part of town as well as Th Khao San, a brash, neon-lit decompression zone for international backpackers. Depending on which one you fancy, it's not difficult to escape the other – another of Banglamphu's charms. The bulk of Bangkok's classic buildings are found in this area, as well as lots of authentic Bangkok cuisine and culture.

Directly across the river is Thonburi, which served a brief tenure as the Thai capital after the fall of Ayuthaya. Today the area along both sides of the river is easily accessed from Bangkok's cross-river ferries, and there are museums and temples in Thonburi that are historical complements to those in Ko Ratanakosin.

Despite the abundance of attractions, Ko Ratanakosin and Banglamphu are still isolated from the more modern forms of public transport. The Chao Phraya River Express is probably the most efficient way of reaching the area, and the *klornng* (canal; also spelt *khlong*) taxi along Khlong Saen Saeb to eastern Banglamphu is another convenient option if you're coming from the Siam Square or Sukhumvit areas. The closest BTS station is Ratchathewi (Map p86).

If you're planning on doing some extensive exploring in the area, consider borrowing one of the free Green Bangkok Bikes (see the boxed text, p151) available at five bike stations within the district.

Ko Ratanakosin

Bangkok's biggest and gaudiest tourist sites float regally on this artificial island. The river ferry pier at Tha Chang is the most convenient access point.

Wat Phra Kaew & Grand

Palace BUDDHIST TEMPLE, PALACE COMPOUND

(วัดพระแก้ว/พระบรมมหาราชวัง; Map p60; admission 350B; ☉8.30am-3.30pm; bus 503, 508, river ferry Tha Chang) Also known as the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, **Wat Phra Kaew** is the colloquial name of the vast, fairy-tale compound that also includes the former residence of the Thai monarch, the Grand Palace.

This ground was consecrated in 1782, the first year of Bangkok rule, and is today Bangkok's biggest tourist attraction and a pilgrimage destination for devout Buddhists and nationalists. The 94.5-hectare grounds encompass more than 100 buildings that represent 200 years of royal history and architectural experimentation. Most of the ar-

TRAVELS OF THE EMERALD BUDDHA

The Emerald Buddha (Phra Kaew Morakot) holds a prominent position in Thai Buddhism in spite of its size (a mere 66cm) and original material (probably jasper quartz or nephrite jade rather than emerald). In fact, the Emerald Buddha was just another ordinary image, with no illustrious pedigree, until its monumental 'coming out' in 15th-century Chiang Rai. During a fall, the image revealed its luminescent interior, which had been covered with plaster (a common practice to safeguard valuable Buddhas from being stolen). After a few successful stints in various temples throughout northern Thailand, the image was stolen by Lao invaders in the mid-16th century and remained in that country for 200 years.

In 1778 Thailand's King Taksin waged war against Laos, retrieving the image and mounting it in Thonburi. Later, when the capital moved to Bangkok and General Chakri took the crown, the Emerald Buddha was honoured with one of the country's most magnificent monuments, Wat Phra Kaew.

chitecture, royal or sacred, can be classified as Ratanakosin (or old-Bangkok style).

Housed in a fantastically decorated *bòht* (*chapel*) and guarded by pairs of *yaksha* (mythical giants), the **Emerald Buddha** is the temple's primary attraction. It sits atop an elevated altar, barely visible amid the gilded decorations. The diminutive figure is always cloaked in royal robes, one for each season (hot, cool and rainy). In a solemn ceremony, the king (or in recent years, the crown prince) changes the garments at the beginning of each season. Recently restored **Buddhist murals** line the interior walls of the *bòht*, and the **murals of the Ramakian** (the Thai version of the Indian epic the *Ramayana*) line the inside walls of the temple compound. Originally painted during the reign of Rama I (1782–1809) and also recently restored, the murals illustrate the epic in its entirety, beginning at the north gate and moving clockwise around the compound.

Except for an anteroom here and there, the buildings of the **Grand Palace** (Phra Borom Maharatchawong) are now put to use by the king only for certain ceremonial occasions, such as Coronation Day.

Borombhiman Hall (eastern end), a French-inspired structure that served as a residence for Rama VI, is occasionally used to house visiting foreign dignitaries. The building to the west is **Amarindra Hall**, originally a hall of justice but used today for coronation ceremonies.

The largest of the palace buildings is the **Chakri Mahaprasat**, the Grand Palace Hall. Built in 1882 by British architects using Thai labour, the exterior is a peculiar blend of Italian Renaissance and traditional Thai architecture. It's a style often referred to as *fa-ràng sài chá-dah* (Westerner in a Thai crown) because each wing is topped by a *mon-dòp* – a heavily ornamented spire representing a Thai adaptation of the Hindu *mandapa* (shrine). The tallest *mon-dòp*, in the centre, contains the ashes of Chakri kings; the flanking *mon-dòp* enshrine the ashes of Chakri princes. Thai kings housed their huge harems in the inner palace area, which was guarded by combat-trained female sentries.

Last, from east to west, is the Ratanakosin-style **Dusit Hall**, which initially served as a venue for royal audiences and later as a royal funerary hall.

i DRESS FOR THE OCCASION

Most of Bangkok's biggest tourist attractions are sacred places, and visitors should dress and behave appropriately. In particular at Wat Phra Kaew, the Grand Palace and in Dusit Park, you won't be allowed to enter unless you're well covered. Shorts, sleeveless shirts or spaghetti-strap tops, short skirts, capri pants – basically anything that reveals more than your arms (certainly don't show your shoulders) knees and head – are not allowed. This applies to men and women. Violators can expect to be shown into a dressing room and loaned a sarong before being allowed to go in.

For walking in the courtyard areas you are supposed to wear shoes with closed heels and toes, although these rules aren't as zealously enforced. Regardless, footwear should always be removed before entering any main *bòht* (chapel) or *wi-háhn* (sanctuary). When sitting in front of a Buddha image, tuck your feet behind you to avoid the highly offensive pose of pointing your feet towards a revered figure.

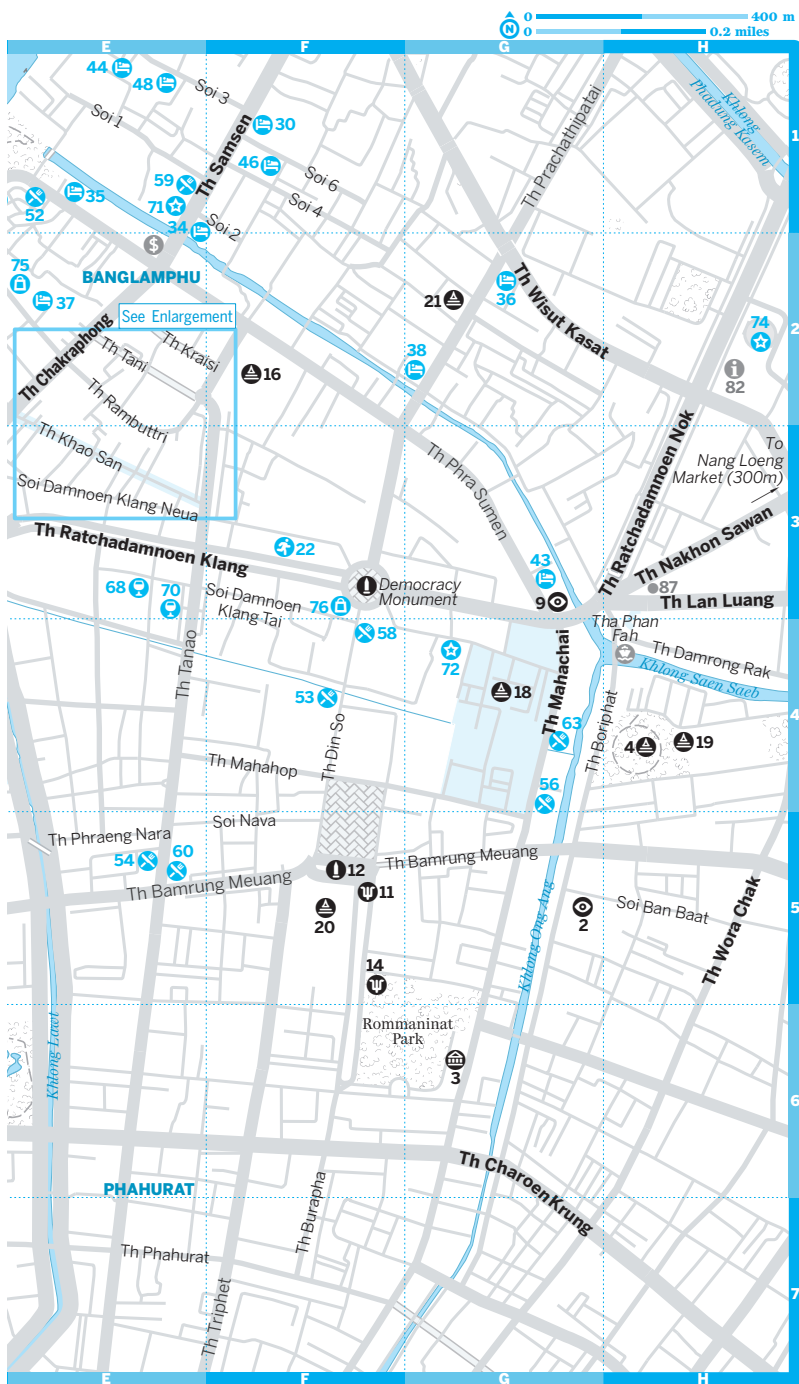
Guides can be hired at the ticket kiosk; ignore offers from anyone outside. An audio guide can be rented for 200B for two hours. Wat Phra Kaew and the Grand Palace are best reached either by a short walk south from Banglamphu, via Sanam Luang, or by Chao Phraya Express boat to Tha Chang. From the Siam Sq area – in front of the **MBK Center** (Th Phra Ram I), take bus 47.

Admission to the complex includes entrance to **Dusit Park** (p89), which includes Vimanmaek Teak Mansion and Abhisek Dusit Throne Hall.

Wat Pho

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(วัดโพธิ์ (วัดพระเชตุพน); Wat Phra Chetuphon; Map p60; Th Sanam Chai; admission 50B; ☎8am–9pm; bus 508, 512, river ferry Tha Tien) You'll find (slightly) fewer tourists here than at Wat Phra Kaew, but Wat Pho is our personal fave among Bangkok's biggest temples. In fact, the compound incorporates a host of superlatives: the largest reclining Buddha, the largest collection of Buddha images in Thailand and the country's earliest centre for public education.



Ko Ratanakosin, Banglamphu & Thonburi

📍 Top Sights

Grand Palace	C5
Wat Pho	D6

📍 Sights

1 Amulet Market	C4
2 Ban Baht (Monk's Bowl Village).....	G5
Buddhaisawan (Phutthaisawan)	
Chapel	(see 8)
3 Corrections Museum	G6
Emerald Buddha	(see 17)
4 Golden Mount.....	H4
5 Lak Meuang (City Pillar)	D5
6 Museum of Siam.....	D7
7 National Gallery.....	D3
8 National Museum.....	C3
9 Queen's Gallery	G3
10 Royal Barges National Museum.....	A2
11 Saan Jao Phitsanu	F5
12 Sao Ching-Cha	F5
13 Songkran Niyosane Forensic	
Medicine Museum & Parasite	
Museum	B3
14 Thewa Sathan	F5
15 Wat Arun	C7
16 Wat Bowonniwet.....	F2
17 Wat Phra Kaew.....	D5
18 Wat Ratchanatdaram Worawihan.....	G4
19 Wat Saket.....	H4
20 Wat Suthat.....	F5
21 Wat Tritosathep.....	G2

📍 Activities, Courses & Tours

22 Grasshopper Adventures.....	F3
International Buddhist Meditation	
Centre	(see 26)
23 Khao	A7
Meditation Study and Retreat	
Center	(see 26)
24 Segway Tour Thailand	C4
25 Sor Vorapin Gym	D2
26 Wat Mahathat	C4
27 Wat Pho Thai Traditional Medical	
and Massage School.....	C7

📍 Sleeping

28 Arun Residence	C7
29 Aurum: The River Place.....	D7
30 Baan Chantra	F1
31 Baan Sabai	D2
32 Buddy Boutique Hotel	B7
33 Chakrabongse Villas	D7
34 Diamond House.....	E1
35 Fortville Guesthouse.....	E1
36 Hotel Dé Moc.....	G2
37 Lamphu House	E2
38 Lamphu Tree House	G2
39 NapPark Hostel.....	B6
40 Navalai River Resort.....	D1
41 New Merry V Guest House.....	D2
42 New Siam Riverside	D2
43 Old Bangkok Inn	G3
44 Penpark Place.....	E1

Almost too big for its shelter, the genuinely impressive **Reclining Buddha**, 46m long and 15m high, illustrates the passing of the Buddha into nirvana (ie the Buddha's death). The figure is modelled out of plaster around a brick core and finished in gold leaf. Mother-of-pearl inlay ornaments the feet, displaying 108 different auspicious *lāk-sà-nà* (characteristics of a Buddha).

The **Buddha images** on display in the other four *wi-hahn* (sanctuary) are worth a nod. Particularly beautiful are the Phra Chinnarat and Phra Chinnachai Buddhas, both from Sukhothai, in the west and south chapels. The galleries extending between the four chapels feature no less than 394 gilded Buddha images, many of which display Ayutthaya or Sukhothai features. The remains of Rama I are interred in the base of the presiding Buddha image in the *bòht*.

Wat Pho is also the national headquarters for the teaching and preservation of

traditional Thai medicine, including Thai massage, a mandate legislated by Rama III when the tradition was in danger of extinction. The famous **massage school** has two massage pavilions located within the temple area and additional rooms within the training facility outside the temple (p93). Nearby stone inscriptions showing yoga and massage techniques still remain in the temple grounds, serving their original purpose as visual aids.

The rambling grounds of Wat Pho cover 8 hectares, with the major tourist sites occupying the northern side of Th Chetuphon and the monastic facilities found on the southern side.

Amulet Market

MARKET

(ตลาดพระเครื่องวัดมหาธาตุ; Map p60; Th Maha Rat; ☀7am-5pm; river ferry Tha Chang) This equal-parts bizarre and fascinating market claims both the footpaths along Th Maha Rat and

45 Praya Palaazzo.....	D1	69 Roof Bar.....	A7
46 Rajata Hotel.....	F1	70 Taksura.....	E3
47 Rikka Inn.....	B7		
48 Sam Sen Sam.....	E1	★ Entertainment	
49 Viengtai Hotel.....	A6	71 Ad Here the 13th.....	E1
50 Villa Cha-Cha.....	B6	Brick Bar.....	(see 32)
51 Wild Orchid Villa.....	D2	72 Club Culture.....	G4
		73 National Theatre.....	D3
		74 Ratchadamnoen Stadium.....	H2
✕ Eating			
52 Ann's Sweet.....	E1	🛒 Shopping	
53 Arawy.....	F4	75 Book Lover.....	E2
54 Chote Chitr.....	E5	76 RimKhobFah Bookstore.....	F3
55 Hemlock.....	D2	77 Saraban.....	B7
56 Jay Fai.....	G4	78 Shaman Bookstore.....	B7
57 Khunkung.....	B5	79 Taekee Taekon.....	D1
58 Krua Aporn.....	F4	80 Th Khao San Market.....	A7
59 May Kaidee.....	E1		
60 Poj Spa Kar.....	E5	ℹ Information	
61 Ranee's.....	A7	81 Bangkok Information	
62 Shoshana.....	A6	Center.....	C2
63 Thip Samai.....	G4	82 Tourism Authority of	
		Thailand.....	H2
🍷 Drinking		83 Tourist Information Booth.....	C5
Amorosa.....	(see 28)	84 Tourist Information Booth.....	A6
64 Center Khao San.....	A7	85 Tourist Information Booth.....	B6
65 Gazebo.....	D3		
66 Hippie de Bar.....	A7	🚗 Transport	
67 Molly Bar.....	B7	86 Air Asia.....	B7
Mulligans.....	(see 32)	87 Thai Airways International.....	H3
68 Phranakorn Bar.....	E3		
Rolling Bar.....	(see 38)		

Th Phra Chan, as well as a dense network of covered market stalls near Tha Phra Chan. The trade is based around small talismans carefully prized by collectors, monks, taxi drivers and people in dangerous professions. Potential buyers, often already sporting tens of amulets, can be seen bargaining and flipping through magazines dedicated to the amulets, some of which command astronomical prices.

Also along this strip are handsome shop-houses overflowing with family-run herbal-medicine and traditional-massage shops, and additional street vendors selling used books, cassettes and, oddly enough, dentures.

Museum of Siam MUSEUM
(สถาบันพิพิธภัณฑ์การเรียนรู้แห่งชาติ; Map p60; www.museumiam.com; Th Maha Rat; admission 300B; ☀10am-6pm Tue-Sun; bus 32, 524, river ferry Tha Tien) This fun museum employs a variety of media to explore the origins and culture

of the Thai people. Housed in a Rama III-era palace, the exhibits are superinteractive, well balanced and entertaining. Highlights include the informative and engaging narrated videos in each exhibition room, and an interactive Ayuthaya-era battle game.

National Museum MUSEUM
(พิพิธภัณฑสถานแห่งชาติ; Map p60; 4 Th Na Phra That; admission 200B; ☀9am-3.30pm Wed-Sun; bus 32, 123, 503, river ferry Tha Chang) Often touted as Southeast Asia's biggest museum, the National Museum is home to an impressive collection of religious sculpture, best appreciated on one the museum's twice-weekly guided **tours** (☀9.30am Wed & Thu).

Most of the museum's structures were built in 1782 as the palace of Rama I's viceroy, Prince Wang Na. Rama V turned it into a museum in 1874, and the current museum consists of three permanent exhibitions spread out over several buildings.

ART ATTACK

Although Bangkok's hyper-urban environment seems to cater to the inner philistine in all of us, the city has a significant but low-key art scene. In recent years, galleries seem to have been opening on a weekly basis, and Bangkok also acts as something of a regional art hub, with works by emerging artists from places such as Myanmar and Cambodia. To find out what's happening while you're in town, pick up a free copy of the excellent **BAM!** (Bangkok Art Map; www.bangkokartmap.com).

Our picks of the better galleries:

- » **100 Tonson Gallery** (Map p86; www.100tonsongallery.com; 100 Soi Tonson, Th Ploenchit; ☺11am-7pm Thu-Sun; BTS Chit Lom) Atmospheric gallery showcasing the work of domestic and international emerging and high-profile painters, sculptors and conceptual artists.
- » **Bangkok Art and Culture Centre** (BACC; Map p86; www.bacc.or.th; cnr Th Phayathai & Th Phra Ram 1; ☺10am-9pm Tue-Sun; BTS Siam or National Stadium) This brand-new state-owned complex combines art and commerce in a multistorey building smack-dab in the centre of Bangkok.
- » **H Gallery** (Map p82; www.hgallerybkk.com; 201 Soi 12, Th Sathon; ☺10am-6pm Wed-Sat, by appointment Tue; BTS Surasak) Leading commercial gallery for emerging Thai abstract painters.
- » **Kathmandu Photo Gallery** (Map p82; www.kathmandu-bkk.com; 87 Th Pan; ☺11am-7pm Tues-Sun; BTS Surasak) Bangkok's only truly dedicated photography gallery is located in a restored Sino-Portuguese shophouse. The small upstairs gallery plays host to changing exhibitions by local and international artists and photographers.
- » **Queen's Gallery** (Map p60; www.queengallery.org; 101 Th Ratchadamnoen Klang; admission 30B; ☺10am-7pm Thu-Tue; bus 2, 15, 44, 511, klong taxi Tha Phan Fah) This royally funded gallery presents five floors of rotating exhibitions of modern and traditionally influenced art.
- » **Surapon Gallery** (Map p90; www.rama9art.org/gallery/surapon/index.html; 1st fl, Tisco Tower, Th Sathon Neua; ☺11am-6pm Tue-Sat; MRT Lumpini) Unique contemporary Thai art.
- » **Tang Gallery** (Map p82; basement, Silom Galleria, 919/1 Th Silom; ☺11am-7pm Tue-Sat; BTS Surasak) Bangkok's primary venue for modern artists from China has also edged its way up to become among the city's top contemporary galleries. Check the posters in the lobby of the Galleria to see what's on.

The **history wing** has made impressive bounds towards mainstream curatorial aesthetics with a succinct chronology of prehistoric, Sukhothai-, Ayuthaya- and Bangkok-era events and figures. Gems include King Ramakamhaeng's inscribed stone pillar, said to be the oldest record of Thai writing; King Taksin's throne; the Rama V section; and the screening of the movie about King Prajadhipok, *The Magic Ring*.

The **decorative arts and ethnology exhibit** covers every possible handicraft: traditional musical instruments, ceramics, clothing and textiles, woodcarving, regalia and weaponry. The **archaeology and art history wing** has exhibits ranging from prehistoric to the Bangkok period.

In addition to the main exhibition halls, the **Buddhaisawan (Phutthaisawan) Chapel** includes some well-preserved origi-

nal murals and one of the country's most revered Buddha images, Phra Phut Sihing. Legend says the image came from Sri Lanka, but art historians attribute it to 13th-century Sukhothai.

Lak Meuang (City Pillar)

ANIMIST SHRINE

(ศาลหลักเมือง; Map p60; cnr Th Ratchadamnoen Nai & Th Lak Meuang; admission free; ☺6.30am-6.30pm; bus 2, 60, 507, river ferry Tha Chang) Serving as the spiritual keystone of Bangkok, Lak Meuang is a phallus-shaped wooden pillar erected by Rama I during the founding of the new capital city in 1782. Today the structure shimmers with gold leaf and is housed in a white cruciform sanctuary. Part of an animistic tradition, the pillar embodies the city's guardian spirit (Phra Sayam Thewathirat) and also lends a practical purpose as a

(Continued on page 73)

(Continued from page 64)

marker of the town's crossroads and measuring point for distances between towns.

If you're lucky, a *lā-kon gāa bon* (commissioned dance) may be in progress. Brilliantly costumed dancers measure out subtle movements as gratitude to the guardian spirit for granting a worshipper's wish.

National Gallery

MUSEUM

(พิพิธภัณฑสถานแห่งชาติ หอศิลป์; Map p60; 4 Th Chao Fa; admission 200B; ☎9am-4pm Wed-Sun; river ferry Tha Phra Athit) The humble National Gallery belies the country's impressive tradition of fine arts. Decorating the walls of this early Ratanakosin-era building are works of contemporary art, mostly by artists who receive government support. The permanent exhibition is rather dated and dusty, but the temporary exhibitions, held in spacious halls out back, can be good.

Banglamphu

Although slightly less grand than those of its neighbour, Banglamphu's sights are a window into the Bangkok of yesterday, a city that's largely starting to disappear.

Golden Mount

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(วัดพระเกศ (ภูเขาทอง); Map p60; Th Boriphat; admission 10B; ☎7.30am-5.30pm; bus 8, 37, 47, klong taxi Tha Phan Fah) Even if you're wāt-ed out, you should take a brisk walk to the Golden Mount. Like all worthy summits, the temple plays a good game of optical illusion, appearing closer than its real location. Serpentine steps wind through an artificial hill shaded by gnarled trees, some of which are signed in English, and past graves and pictures of wealthy benefactors. At the peak, you'll find a breezy 360-degree view of Bangkok's most photogenic side.

This artificial hill was created when a large stupa, under construction by Rama III, collapsed because the soft soil beneath would not support it. The resulting mud-and-brick hill was left to sprout weeds until Rama IV built a small stupa on its crest. Rama V later added to the structure and housed a Buddha relic from India (given to him by the British government) in the stupa. The concrete walls were added during WWII to prevent the hill from eroding. Every year in November there is a big festival on the grounds of Wat Saket, which includes a candlelit procession up the Golden Mount.

If you're coming from the eastern end of the city, the Golden Mount is a short walk

south of the *klong* boats' western terminus at Tha Phan Fah.

Wat Suthat & Ao Ching-Cha

BUDDHIST TEMPLE & MONUMENT

(วัดสุทัศนเทพวราราม; Map p60; Th Bamrung Meuang; admission 20B; ☎8.30am-9pm; bus 10, 12, klong taxi Tha Phan Fah) Brahmanism predated the arrival of Buddhism in Thailand and its rituals were eventually integrated into the dominant religion. **Wat Suthat** is the headquarters of the Brahman priests who perform the Royal Ploughing Ceremony in May. Begun by Rama I and completed in later reigns, Wat Suthat boasts a *wi-hāhn* with gilded bronze Buddha images (including Phra Si Sakayamuni, one of the largest surviving Sukhothai bronzes) and incredibly expansive *jataka* (stories of the Buddha's previous lives) murals (see the boxed text, p74). The wāt also holds the rank of Rachavoramahavihan, the highest royal-temple grade; the ashes of Rama VIII (Ananda Mahidol, the current king's deceased older brother) are contained in the base of the main Buddha image in the *wi-hāhn*.

Wat Suthat's priests also perform rites at two nearby Hindu shrines: **Thewa Sathan** (Deva Sathan), which contains images of Shiva and Ganesh; and the smaller **Saan Jao Phitsanu** (Vishnu Shrine), dedicated to Vishnu.

The spindly red arch in the front of the temple is **Sao Ching-Cha** (Giant Swing), as much a symbol of Bangkok as Wat Phra Kaew. The swing formerly hosted a spectacular Brahman festival in honour of Shiva, in which participants would swing in ever-higher arcs in an effort to reach a bag of gold suspended from a 15m bamboo pole. Many died trying and the ritual was discontinued during the reign of Rama VII. In 2007 the decaying swing was ceremoniously replaced with the current model, made from six specially chosen teak logs from Phrae Province in northern Thailand.

The temple is within walking distance of the *klong* boats' terminus at Tha Phan Fah.

Wat Bowonniwet

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(วัดบวรนิเวศวิหาร; Map p60; cnr Th Phra Sumen & Th Tanao; admission free; ☎8am-5.30pm; bus 56, 58, 516, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Founded in 1826, Wat Bowonniwet is the national headquarters for the Thammayut monastic sect. King Mongkut, founder of this minority sect, began a royal tradition by residing here as a monk – in fact, he was the abbot

of Wat Bowonniwet for several years. King Bhumibol (Rama IX) and Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn, as well as several other males in the royal family, have been temporarily ordained as monks. The *ubosot* has some interesting wall murals (see the boxed text, below). Because of the temple's royal status, visitors should be particularly careful to dress properly for admittance to this wát – no shorts or sleeveless shirts.

Wat Ratchanatdaram Worawihan

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(วัดราชนัตดารามวรวิหาร; Map p60; cnr Th Ratchadamnoen Klang & Th Mahachai; admission free; ☉9am-5pm; bus 2, 15, 44, 511, klong taxi Tha Phan Fah) Across Th Mahachai from Wat Saket, Wat Ratchanatdaram dates from the mid-19th century and in addition to Loha Prasat, the metallic, castlelike monastery, is home to a well-known market selling Buddhist *prá pim* (magical charm amulets) in all sizes, shapes and styles. The amulets not

only feature images of the Buddha, but also famous Thai monks and Indian deities. Buddha images are also for sale.

Ban Baht (Monk's Bowl Village)

NEIGHBOURHOOD

(บ้านบัท; Map p60; Soi Ban Baht; ☉10am-6pm; bus 8, 37, 47, klong taxi Tha Phan Fah) Just when you start to lament the adverse effects of tourism, pay a visit to this handicraft village. This is the only surviving village established by Rama I to make the *bàht* (rounded bowls) that the monks carry to receive food alms from faithful Buddhists every morning. Today the average monk relies on a bowl mass-produced in China, but the traditional technique survives in Ban Baht thanks to patronage by tourists.

About half a dozen families still hammer the bowls together from eight separate pieces of steel representing, they say, the eight spokes of the Wheel of Dharma (which symbolise Buddhism's Eightfold Path). The

TEMPLE MURALS

Because of the relative wealth of Bangkok, as well as its role as the country's artistic and cultural centre, the artists commissioned to paint the walls of the city's various temples were among the most talented around, and Bangkok's temple paintings are regarded as the finest in Thailand. Some particularly exceptional works:

- » **Wat Bowonniwet** (see p73) Painted by an artist called In Kong during the reign of Rama II, the murals in the panels of the *ubosot* (chapel) of this temple include Thai depictions of Western life (possibly copied from magazine illustrations) during the early 19th century.
- » **Wat Chong Nonsi** (วัดทองนพนที; Map p56; Th Nonsi, off Th Phra Ram III; admission free; ☉8am-6pm; MRT Khlong Toei & access by taxi) Dating back to the late Ayuthaya period, Bangkok's earliest surviving temple paintings are faded and missing in parts, but the depictions of everyday Thai life, including bawdy illustrations of a sexual nature, are well worth visiting.
- » **Buddhaisawan (Phutthaisawan) Chapel** (p63) Although construction of this temple, located in the National Museum, began in 1795, the paintings were probably finished during the reign of Rama III (1824–51). Among other scenes, the graceful murals depict the conception, birth and early life of the Buddha – common topics among Thai temple murals.
- » **Wat Suthat** (p73) Almost as impressive in their vast scale as for their quality, the murals at Wat Suthat are among the most awe-inspiring in the country. Gory depictions of Buddhist hell can be found on a pillar directly behind the Buddha statue.
- » **Wat Suwannaram** (วัดสุวรรณาราม; Map p56; 33 Soi 32, Th Charoen Sanitwong, Khlong Bangkok Noi; admission free; ☉8am-6pm; klong taxi from Tha Chang) These paintings inside a late Ayuthaya-era temple in Thonburi contain skilled and vivid depictions of battle scenes and foreigners, including Chinese and Muslim warriors.
- » **Wat Tritosathep** (วัดตรีทศเทพ; Map p60; Th Prachathipatai; admission free; bus 12, 19, 56) Although still a work in progress, Chakrabhand Posayakrit's postmodern murals at this temple in Banglamphu have already been recognised as masterworks of Thai Buddhist art.

joints are fused in a wood fire with bits of copper, and the bowl is polished and coated with several layers of black lacquer. A typical output is one bowl per day. If you purchase a bowl, the craftsman will show you the equipment and process used.

Thonburi

It's calm enough on the right bank of the Mae Nam Chao Phraya to seem like another province – because it is! The attractions here are relatively few, but *fàng ton* is a great area for aimless wandering among leafy streets.

Wat Arun

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(วัดอรุณฯ; Map p60; Th Arun Amarin; admission 50B; ☉8.30am-4.30pm; cross-river ferry from Tha Tien) Striking Wat Arun commands a martial pose as the third point in the holy trinity (along with Wat Phra Kaew and Wat Pho) of Bangkok's early history. After the fall of Ayuthaya, King Taksin ceremoniously clinched control here on the site of a local shrine (formerly known as Wat Jaeng) and established a royal palace and a temple to house the Emerald Buddha. The temple was renamed after the Indian god of dawn (Aruna) and in honour of the literal and symbolic founding of a new Ayuthaya.

It wasn't until the capital and the Emerald Buddha were moved to Bangkok that Wat Arun received its most prominent characteristic: the 82m-high *prang* (Khmer-style tower). The tower's construction was started during the first half of the 19th century by Rama II and later completed by Rama III. Not apparent from a distance are the ornate floral **mosaics** made from broken, multi-hued Chinese porcelain, a common temple ornamentation in the early Ratanakosin period, when Chinese ships calling at the port of Bangkok discarded tonnes of old porcelain as ballast.

Also worth an inspection is the interior of the *bôht*. The main Buddha image is said to have been designed by Rama II himself. The **murals** date from the reign of Rama V; particularly impressive is one that depicts Prince Siddhartha encountering examples of birth, old age, sickness and death outside his palace walls, an experience that led him to abandon the worldly life. The ashes of Rama II are interred in the base of the presiding Buddha image.

Cross-river ferries (3.50B) run over to Wat Arun every few minutes from Tha Tien.

Sunset views of the temple compound can be caught from across the river at the

riverfront warehouses that line Th Maha Rat. Another great viewpoint is from Amrosa, the rooftop bar at the Arun Residence (p128).

Royal Barges National Museum

MUSEUM

(พิพิธภัณฑ์เรือพระที่นั่ง; Map p60; Khlong Bangkok Noi; admission 100B, photo permit 100B; ☉9am-5pm; river ferry Tha Saphan Phra Pin Klao) The royal barges are slender, fantastically ornamented vessels used in ceremonial processions along the river. The tradition dates back to the Ayuthaya era, when most travel (for commoners and royalty) was by boat. Today the royal barge procession is an infrequent occurrence, most recently performed in 2006 in honour of the 60th anniversary of the king's ascension to the throne. When not in use, the barges are on display at this Thonburi museum.

Suphannahong, the king's personal barge, is the most important of the boats. Made from a single piece of timber, it's the largest dugout in the world. The name means 'Golden Swan', and a huge swan head has been carved into the bow. Lesser barges feature bows that are carved into other Hindu-Buddhist mythological shapes such as *naga* (mythical sea serpent) and *garuda* (Vishnu's bird mount). Historic photos help envision the grand processions in which the largest of the barges would require a rowing crew of 50 men, plus seven umbrella bearers, two helmsmen and two navigators, as well as a flagman, rhythm-keeper and chanter.

The most convenient way to get to the museum is by taking a taxi (ask the driver to go to *reu-a prá tée nâng*) from Tha Saphan Phra Pin Klao. Another alternative is walking from the Bangkok Noi train station (accessible by ferrying to Tha Rot Fai), but the walk is tricky and unpleasant and you'll encounter uninvited guides who will charge for their services. The museum is also an optional stop on long-tail boat trips through Thonburi's canals.

Church of Santa Cruz

CATHOLIC CHURCH

(โบสถ์ซางตาครูส; Map p76; Th Kutti Jiin; admission free; ☉Sat & Sun; cross-river ferry from Tha Pak Tat/Atsadang) Dating back to 1913, this Catholic church holds relatively little interest unless you visit on a Sunday. But the surrounding neighbourhood, a former Portuguese concession dating back to the Ayuthaya period, is worth a wander for its old-school riverside atmosphere and Portuguese-inspired cakes, *kà-nôm fà-ràng*.

Chinatown Phahurat

📍 Sights

- 1 Church of Santa Cruz..... A3
- 2 Gurdwara Siri Guru Singh Sabha C2
- 3 Phahurat Market..... B2
- 4 Talat Mai E2
- 5 Wat Mangkon Kamalawat..... E2
- 6 Wat Traimit..... F3
- Yaowarat Chinatown Heritage Center..... (see 6)

🛏 Sleeping

- 7 @Hua Lamphong G4
- 8 Baan Hualampong..... G4
- 9 China Town Hotel E3
- 10 Shanghai Mansion E3
- 11 Siam Classic..... G4

🍴 Eating

- 12 Burapa Birds Nest E3
- 13 Gõoay Dẽeo Kõoa Gã Stall..... E2

- 14 Jék Pũi..... E2
- 15 Khrua Phornlamai E3
- 16 Lek & Rut E3
- 17 Mangkorn Khão E3
- 18 Nay Lék Uan E3
- 19 Nay Mong E2
- 20 Old Siam Plaza..... B1
- 21 Royal India..... C2
- 22 T&K..... E3

🎭 Entertainment

- 23 Chalermkrung Royal Theatre B1

🛍 Shopping

- 24 Pak Khlong Market..... A2
- 25 Sampeng Lane..... C2

CHINATOWN & PHAHURAT

เยาวราช (สำเพ็ง) พหุรัด

Bangkok's Chinatown (called Yaowarat after its main thoroughfare, Th Yaowarat) is the urban explorer's equivalent of the Amazon Basin. Unlike neighbouring Ko Ratanakosin and Banglamphu, the highlights here aren't tidy temples or museums, but rather a complicated web of tiny alleyways, crowded markets and delicious street stalls. And unlike other Chinatowns around the world, Bangkok's is defiantly ungentrified, and getting lost in it is probably the best thing that could happen to you.

The neighbourhood dates back to 1782 when Bangkok's Chinese population, many of them labourers hired to build the new capital, were moved here from today's Ko Ratanakosin area by the royal rulers. Relatively little has changed since then, and you can still catch conversations in various Chinese dialects, buy Chinese herbal cures or taste Chinese dishes not available elsewhere in Thailand. For those specifically interested in the latter, be sure to check out our food-based walk around the district (p123).

Getting in and out of Chinatown is hindered by horrendous traffic. The river ferry stop at Tha Ratchawong was previously the easiest way to reach the district; however, the advent of the MRT has put the area a brief walk from Hua Lamphong station.

At the western edge of Chinatown is a small but thriving Indian district, gener-

ally called Phahurat. Here, dozens of Indian-owned shops sell all kinds of fabric and clothes.

Wat Traimit

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(วัดไตรมิตร; Temple of the Golden Buddha; Map p76; cnr Th Yaowarat & Th Charoen Krung; admission 40B; ☀8am-5pm Tues-Sun; MRT Hua Lamphong, river ferry Tha Ratchawong) The attraction at Wat Traimit is undoubtedly the impressive 3m-tall, 5.5-tonne, **solid-gold Buddha image**, which gleams like, well, gold. Sculpted in the graceful Sukhothai style, the image was 'discovered' some 40 years ago beneath a stucco or plaster exterior, when it fell from a crane while being moved to a new building within the temple compound. It has been theorised that the covering was added to protect it from marauding hordes, either during the late Sukhothai period or later in the Ayuthaya period when the city was under siege by the Burmese. The temple itself is said to date from the early 13th century.

Donations and a constant flow of tourists have proven profitable, and the statue is now housed in a brand-new four-storey marble structure. The 2nd floor of the building is home to the **Phra Buddha Maha Suwanna Patimakorn Exhibition** (admission 100B; ☀8am-5pm Tues-Sun), which has exhibits on how the statue was made, discovered and came to arrive at its current home, while the 3rd floor is home to the **Yaowarat Chinatown Heritage Center** (admission

OFFBEAT BANGKOK MUSEUMS

If looking at stuffed tigers and Buddha statues is not doing anything for you, then consider a visit to one of these quirky institutions.

» **Ancient City** (Muang Boran; Map p153; www.ancientcity.com; 296/1 Th Sukhumvit, Samut Prakan; adult/child 400/200B; ☀8am-5pm) Claiming to be the largest open-air museum in the world, the site covers more than 80 hectares of peaceful countryside littered with 109 scaled-down facsimiles of many of the kingdom's most famous monuments. It's an excellent place to explore by bicycle (daily rental 50B), as it is usually quiet and never crowded. Ancient City lies outside Samut Prakan, which is accessible via air-conditioned bus 511 from Bearing BTS station at the east end of Th Sukhumvit. Upon reaching the bus terminal at Pak Nam, board minibus 36, which passes the entrance to Ancient City.

» **Bangkok Folk Museum** (Map p80; 273 Soi 43/Saphan Yao, Th Charoen Krung; admission free; ☀10am-4pm Wed-Sun; river ferry Tha Si Phraya) Consisting of three wooden houses, this family-run museum is a window into Bangkok life during the 1950s and '60s. Particularly interesting is the traditional Thai kitchen.

» **Corrections Museum** (Map p60; 436 Th Mahachai; admission free; ☀9am-4pm Mon-Fri; bus 508, klong taxi to Tha Phan Fah) Learn about the painful world of Thai-style punishment at what's left of this former jail. Life-sized models re-enact a variety of horrendous executions and punishments, encouraging most visitors to remain law-abiding citizens for the remainder of their stay.

» **Museum of Counterfeit Goods** (Map p56; ☎0 2653 5555; www.tillekeandgibbins.com/museum/museum.htm; Tilleke & Gibbins, Supalai Grand Tower, 1011 Th Phra Ram III; admission free; ☀8am-5pm Mon-Fri by appointment only; MRT Khlong Toei & access by taxi) This private collection displays all the counterfeit booty that has been collected by the law firm Tilleke & Gibbins over the years. Many of the fake items are displayed alongside the genuine ones.

» **Songkran Niyosane Forensic Medicine Museum & Parasite Museum** (Map p60; 2nd fl, Forensic Pathology Bldg, Siriraj Hospital, Th Phrannok, Thonburi; admission 40B; ☀9am-4pm Mon-Sat; river ferry Tha Wang Lang) This gory institution contains the various appendages and remnants of famous murders, including the bloodied T-shirt from a victim who was stabbed to death with a dildo. The adjacent Parasite Museum is also worth a visit, much for the same reasons as above. The easiest way to reach the museum is by taking the river-crossing ferry to Tha Wang Lang (on the Thonburi side) from Tha Chang. At the exit of the pier, turn right to enter Siriraj Hospital, and follow the signs to the museum.

» **Thai Human Imagery Museum** (Map p153; www.rosenini.com/thaihumanimagery/english.htm; Nakhon Chais, Nakhon Pathom; admission 200B; ☀9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-6pm Sat & Sun) Contains an exhibition of 120 lifelike wax sculptures. A group of Thai artists reportedly spent 10 years studying their subjects and creating the figures, which range from famous Buddhist monks of Thailand to Winston Churchill. The museum is outside town at the Km 31 marker on Th Pinklao-Nakhon Chaisi. Any Nakhon Pathom-Bangkok bus or minivan can drop you off here.

100B; ☀8am-5pm Tues-Sun), a small but engaging museum with multimedia exhibits on the history of Bangkok's Chinatown and its residents.

Talat Mai

MARKET

(ตลาดใหม่; Map p76; Soi 16/Trok Itsaranuphap, Th Yaowarat; bus 73, 159, 507, MRT Hua Lamphong, river ferry Tha Ratchawong) With nearly two centu-

ries of commerce under its belt, 'New Market' is no longer an entirely accurate name for this market. Essentially it's a narrow covered alleyway between tall buildings, but even if you're not interested in food the hectic atmosphere and exotic sights and smells culminate in something of a surreal sensory experience.

While much of the market centres on cooking ingredients, the section north of Th Charoen Krung (equivalent to Soi 21, Th Charoen Krung) is known for selling incense, paper effigies and ceremonial sweets – the essential elements of a traditional Chinese funeral.

FREE **Wat Mangkon**

Kamalawat

CHINESE TEMPLE

(วัดมังกรกมลาวาส; Neng Noi Yee; Map p76; Th Charoen Krung; ☉9am-6pm; bus 73, 159, 507, MRT Hua Lamphong, river ferry Tha Ratchawong) Clouds of incense and the sounds of chanting form the backdrop at this Chinese-style Mahayana Buddhist temple. Dating back to 1871, it's the largest and most important religious structure in the area, and during the annual Vegetarian Festival (see the boxed text, p122), religious and culinary activities are particularly active here.

Phahurat Market

MARKET

(ตลาดพหุรัด; Map p76; Th Phahurat & Th Chakraphet; bus 82, 169, 507, river ferry Tha Saphan Phut) Hidden behind the new and astonishingly out of place India Emporium mall is Phahurat Market, an endless bazaar uniting flamboyant Bollywood fabric, photogenic vendors selling *paan* (betel nut for chewing) and several shops stocked with delicious northern Indian-style sweets.

Gurdwara Siri Guru Singh

Sabha

SIKH TEMPLE

(Map p76; Th Phahurat; ☉9am-5pm) In an alley off Th Chakraphet is this large Sikh temple that's reminiscent of a mosque interior, devoted to the worship of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the 16th-century Sikh holy book, which is itself considered to be a 'living' guru and the last of the religion's 10 great teachers. Reportedly, the temple is the second-largest Sikh temple outside India. Visitors are welcome, but they must remove their shoes.

RIVERSIDE

ข้างแม่น้ำ

Talat Noi

NEIGHBOURHOOD

(ตลาดน้อย; Map p80; Soi Phanurangsi; ☉9am-6pm; river ferry Tha Si Phraya) Bordered by the river, Th Songwat, Th Charoen Krung and Th Yotha, this ancient neighbourhood is a fascinating jumble of tiny alleys, greasy machine shops and traditional architecture. Located opposite the River View Guest House, **San Jao Sien Khong** (Map p80; admission free; ☉6am-6pm) is one of the city's oldest Chinese shrines and also one of the best areas to be

during the annual Vegetarian Festival (see the boxed text, p122).

SILOM & SATHON

สีลม/สาทร

The business district of Th Silom has only a handful of tourist attractions scattered among the corporate hotels, office towers and wining-and-dining restaurants. As you get closer to the river, the area becomes spiced with the sights and smells of its Indian and Muslim residents. Moving north along Th Charoen Krung, the area adjacent to the river was the international mercantile district during Bangkok's shipping heyday.

Traffic is notorious in this part of town, but the BTS, MRT and Chao Phraya Express provide some transport relief.

MJR Kukrit Pramoj House

MUSEUM

(บ้านหม่อมราชวงศ์คึกฤทธิ์ปราโมช; Map p82; Soi 7/Phra Phinij, Th Narathiwat Rachananakharin; adult/child 50/20B; ☉10am-4pm; BTS Chong Nonsi) Author and statesman Mom Ratchawong (MR, an honorary royal title) Kukrit Pramoj once resided in this charming Thai house, now open to the public as a museum. European-educated but devoutly Thai, MR Kukrit surrounded himself with the best of both worlds: five traditional teak buildings, Thai art, Western books and lots of heady conversations. A guided tour is recommended for a more intimate introduction to the former resident, who authored more than 150 books and served as prime minister of Thailand.

Queen Saovabha Memorial Institute (Snake Farm)

SNAKE FARM

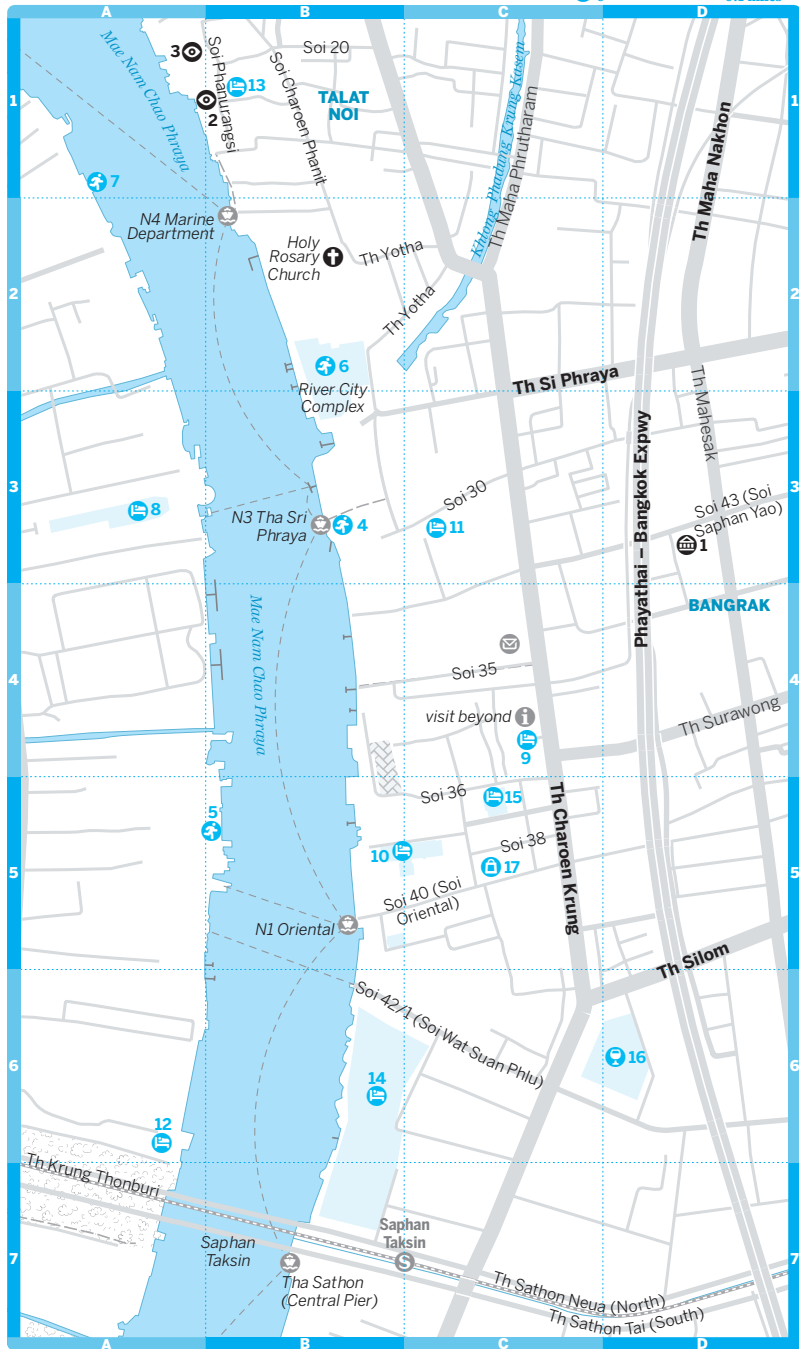
(สถานเสาวภา (สวนงู); Map p82; www.saovabha.com; cnr Th Phra Ram IV & Th Henri Dunant; adult/child 200/50B; ☉9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat & Sun; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) Snake farms tend to gravitate towards carnivalesque rather than humanitarian, except at the Queen Saovabha Memorial Institute. Founded in 1923, the snake farm prepares antivenin from venomous snakes. This is done by milking the snakes' venom, injecting it into horses, and harvesting and purifying the antivenom that they produce. The antivenoms are then used to treat human victims of snake bites.

The leafy grounds are home to a few caged snakes (and a constant soundtrack of Western rock music), but the bulk of the attractions are found in the Simaseng Building, at the rear of the compound. The ground floor houses several varieties of snakes in glass cages. Regular **milking** (☉11am Mon-Fri) and **snake-handling performances** (☉2.30pm Mon-Fri & 11am Sat & Sun) are held at the outdoor amphitheatre.

Riverside



BANGKOK



Riverside

📍 Sights

- 1 Bangkok Folk Museum..... D3
- 2 San Jao Sien Khong..... B1
- 3 Talat Noi..... A1

📍 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 4 Loy Nava B3
- 5 Oriental Spa..... B5
- 6 Wan Fah Cruises..... B2
- 7 Yok Yor Restaurant..... A1

📍 Sleeping

- 8 Millennium Hilton..... A3
- 9 New Road Guesthouse..... C4
- 10 Oriental Hotel..... B5
- 11 P&R Residence..... C3
- 12 Peninsula Hotel..... A6
- 13 River View Guest House..... B1

- 14 Shangri-La Hotel..... B6
- 15 Swan Hotel..... C5

📍 Eating

- Le Normandie (see 10)
- Lord Jims..... (see 10)

📍 Drinking

- 16 Sirocco Sky Bar..... D6

📍 Entertainment

- Bamboo Bar (see 10)

📍 Shopping

- River City Complex..... (see 6)
- 17 Thai Home Industries C5

Sri Mahariamman Temple HINDU TEMPLE

(วัดศรีมหาอุมาเทวี (วัดแขกสีลม); Wat Phra Si Maha Umathewi; Map p82; cnr Th Silom & Th Pan; admission free; ☀6am-8pm; bus 15, 504, BTS Surasak) Standing out, even among Bangkok's golden wát, this Hindu temple virtually leaps off the block. Built in the 1860s by Tamil immigrants in the centre of a still thriving ethnic enclave, the structure is a stacked facade of intertwined, full-colour Hindu deities. In the centre of the main shrine is Jao Mae Maha Umathewi (Uma Devi, also known as Shakti, Shiva's consort), and along the left interior wall sit rows of Shiva, Vishnu and other Hindu deities, as well as a few Buddhas, so that just about any non-Muslim, non-Judaeo-Christian Asian can worship here.

This call this temple Wat Khaek - *kàak* is a colloquial expression for people of Indian descent. The literal translation is 'guest', an obvious euphemism for a group of people that locals don't particularly want as permanent residents; hence most Indians living permanently in Thailand don't appreciate the term.

SIAM SQUARE & PRATUNAM

สยามสแควร์/ประตูน้ำ

Commerce, mainly in the form of multistorey mega-malls, forms the main attraction in this part of town, but there are a couple of sights that don't involve credit cards. The BTS and *klorng* taxis provide easy access to most attractions here.

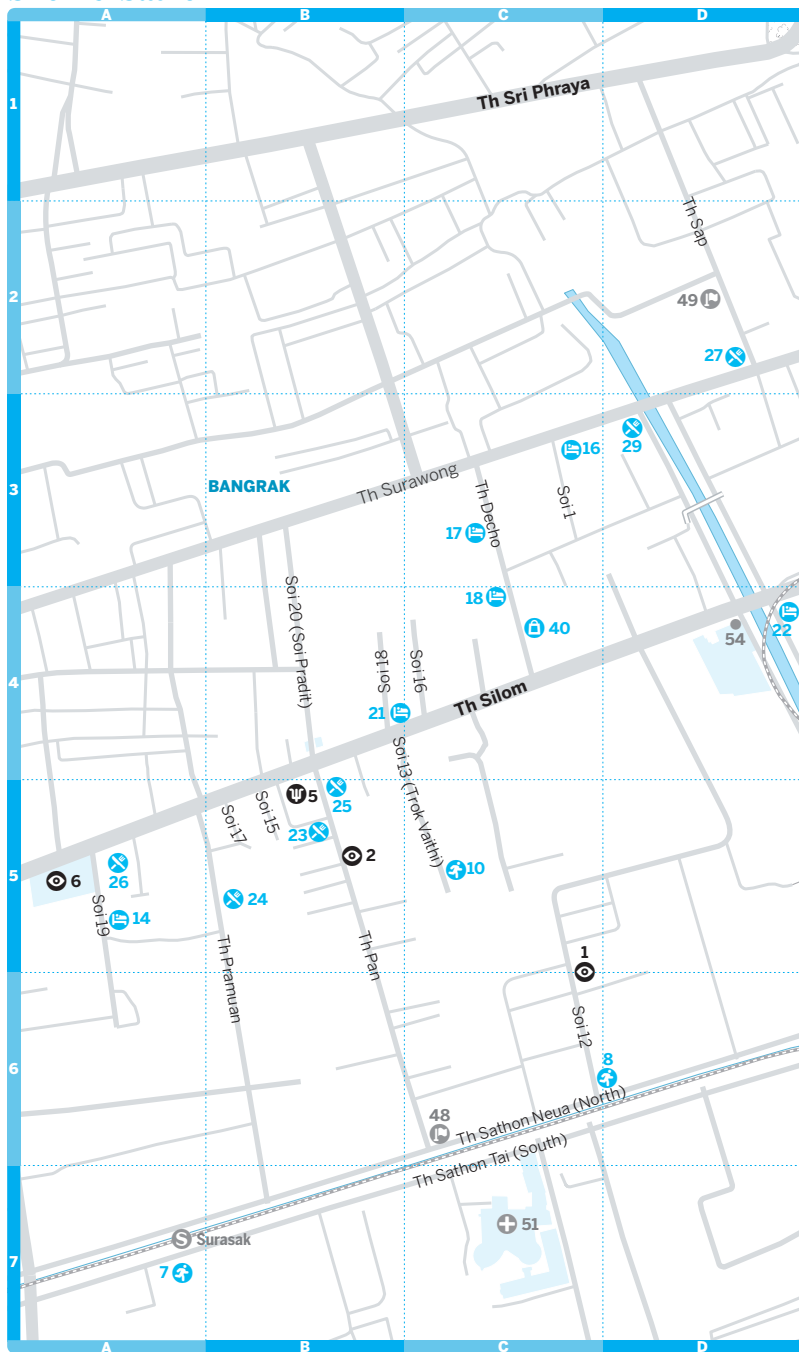
Erawan Shrine BRAHMIN SHRINE

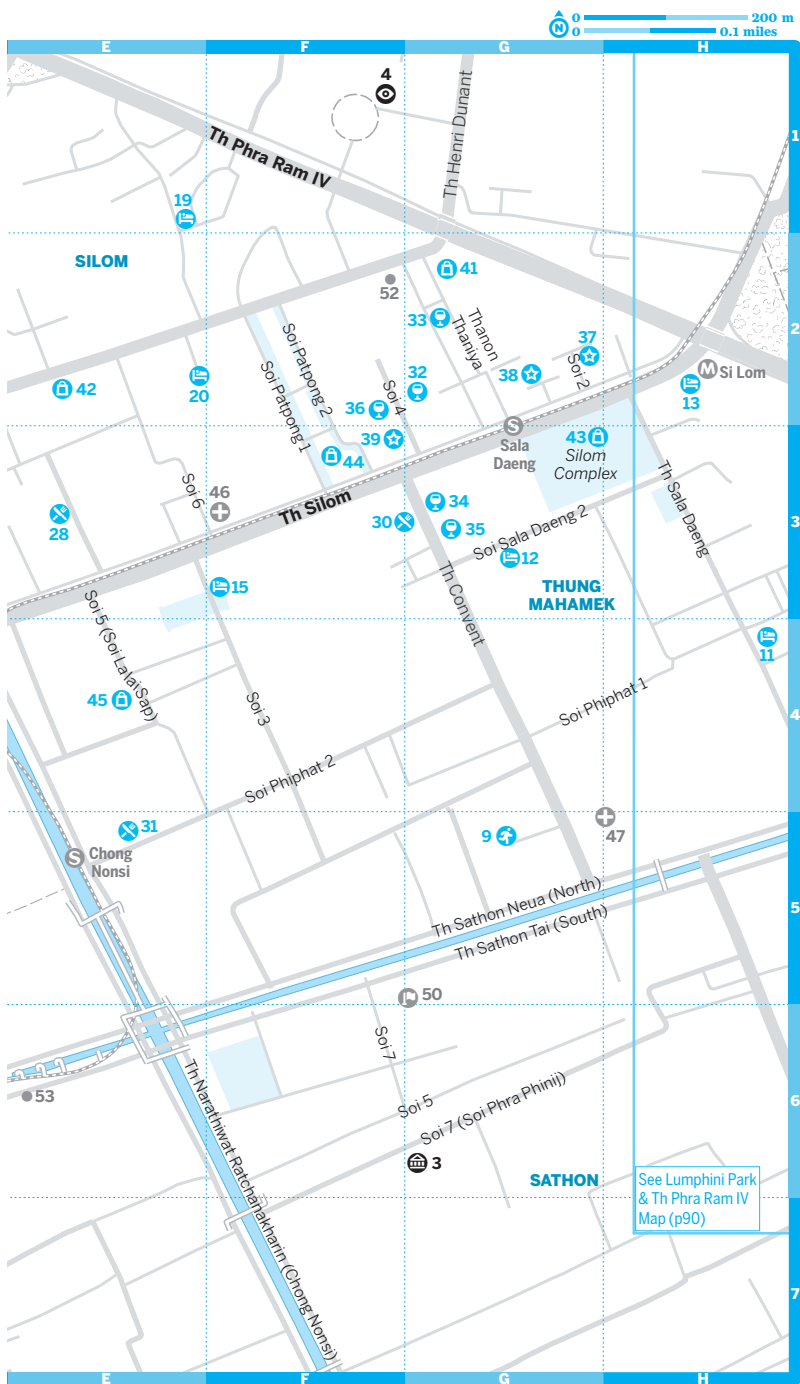
(ศาลพระพรหม; San Phra Phrom; Map p86; cnr Th Ratchadamri & Th Ploenchit; admission free; ☀6am-11pm; BTS Chit Lom) The Erawan Shrine was originally built in 1956 as something of a last-ditch effort to end a string of misfortunes that occurred during the construction of the hotel, at that time known as the Erawan Hotel. After several incidents ranging from injured construction workers to the sinking of a ship carrying marble for the hotel, a Brahmin priest was consulted. Since the hotel was to be named after the elephant escort of Indra in Hindu mythology, the priest determined that Erawan required a passenger, and suggested it be that of Lord Brahma. A statue was built, and lo and behold, the misfortunes miraculously ended.

Although the original Erawan Hotel was demolished in 1987, the shrine still exists, and today remains an important place of pilgrimage for Thais, particularly those in need of some material assistance. Those making a wish from the statue should ideally come between 7am and 8am, or 7pm and 8pm, and should offer a specific list of items that includes candles, incense, sugar cane or bananas, all of which are almost exclusively given in multiples of seven. Particularly popular are teak elephants, the money gained through the purchase of which is donated to a charity run by the current hotel, the Grand Hyatt Erawan. And as the tourist brochures depict, it is also possible for you to charter a

Silom & Sathon

BANGKOK





Silom & Sathon

📍 Sights

- 1 H Gallery..... C5
- 2 Kathmandu Photo Gallery..... B5
- 3 MR Kukrit Pramoj House..... G6
- 4 Queen Saovabha Memorial
Institute (Snake Farm)..... F1
- 5 Sri Mahariamman Temple..... B5
- 6 Tang Gallery..... A5

🍽️ Activities, Courses & Tours

- 7 Blue Elephant Thai Cooking
School..... A7
- 8 Health Land..... D6
- 9 Ruen-Nuad Massage Studio..... G5
- 10 Silom Thai Cooking School..... C5

🛏️ Sleeping

- 11 Baan Saladaeng..... H4
- 12 Bangkok Christian Guest House..... G3
- 13 Dusit Thani..... H2
- 14 Heritage Baan Silom..... A5
- 15 HQ Hostel..... F3
- 16 La Résidence Hotel..... C3
- 17 Lub*d..... C3
- 18 LUX..... C4
- 19 Rose Hotel..... E1
- 20 Siam Heritage..... E2
- 21 Triple Two Silom..... B4
- 22 YHA Downtown Bangkok..... D4

🍴 Eating

- 23 Chennai Kitchen..... B5
D'Sens..... (see 13)
- 24 Kalapapruek..... B5
- 25 Khrua Aroy Aroy..... B5
- 26 Nadimos..... A5
- 27 Scoozi..... D2

- 28 Soi 10 Food Centres..... E3
- 29 Somboon Seafood..... D3
- 30 Somtam Convent..... F3
- 31 The Foodie..... E5

🍷 Drinking

- 32 Balcony..... G2
- 33 Barbican Bar..... G2
- 34 Coyote on Convent..... G3
- 35 Molly Malone's..... G3
- 36 Telephone..... F2

🎵 Entertainment

- 37 DJ Station..... G2
- 38 G.O.D..... G2
- 39 Tapas Room..... F3

🛍️ Shopping

- 40 House of Chao..... C4
- 41 Jim Thompson..... G2
- 42 Jim Thompson Factory Outlet..... E2
- 43 Orchid Books..... G3
- 44 Patpong Night Market..... F3
- 45 Soi Lalai Sap..... E4

🏥 Information

- 46 Bangkok Christian Hospital..... F3
- 47 BNH..... H5
- 48 Myanmar Embassy..... C6
- 49 Russia Embassy..... D2
- 50 Singapore Embassy..... G5
- 51 St Louis Hospital..... C7
- 52 STA Travel..... F2

🚆 Transport

- 53 Nok Air..... E6
- 54 Thai Airways International..... D4

classical Thai dance, often done as a way of giving thanks if a wish was granted.

Lingam Shrine at Nai Lert Park

ANIMIST SHRINE

(ศาลเจ้าแม่ทับทิม; Saan Jao Mae Thap Thim; Map p86; Swissôtel Nai Lert Park, Th Witthayu/Wireless Rd; admission free; 🕒24hr; BTS Phloen Chit, klong taxi Tha Witthayu) Clusters of carved stone and wooden phalli surround a spirit house and shrine built by millionaire businessman Nai Lert to honour Jao Mae Thap Thim, a female deity thought to reside in the old banyan tree on the site. Someone who made an offering shortly thereafter had a baby, and the shrine has received a steady stream of

worshippers – mostly young women seeking fertility – ever since. To get here if facing the entrance of the Swissôtel, follow the small concrete pathway to the right that winds down into the bowels of the building beside the car park. The shrine is at the end of the building next to the canal.

LUMPHINI PARK & TH PHRA RAM IV

สวนลุมพินี/ถนนพระราม ๔

The main attraction in this hyper-urban part of town is, rather paradoxically, the city's single largest green zone.

The MRT, with stops at Lumphini, Silom and Th Phra Ram IV, is the best way to reach this area.

Lumphini Park

PARK

(สวนลุมพินี; Map p90; Th Phra Ram IV, btwn Th Withayu/Wireless Rd & Th Ratchadamri; admission free; ☀4.30am-9pm; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Lumphini or Si Lom) Named after the Buddha's place of birth in Nepal, Lumphini Park is the best way to escape Bangkok without leaving town. Shady paths, a large artificial lake and swept lawns temporarily blot out the roaring traffic and hulking concrete towers.

There are **paddleboats** (per 1/2 hr 40B) for lovers, **playgrounds** for the kids, open-air concerts on Sunday afternoon, and one of the best times to visit the park is before 7am when the air is fresh (well, relatively so for Bangkok) and legions of Thai-Chinese are practising *taijiquan* (t'ai chi). The park reawakens with the evening's cooler temperatures – aerobics classes collectively sweat to a techno soundtrack. Late at night the borders of the park are frequented by street-walking prostitutes, both male and female.

SUKHUMVIT

สุขุมวิท

More time will be spent here eating, drinking and perhaps sleeping (as there is a high concentration of hotels in the area) rather than sightseeing.

The BTS is the primary public-transport option.

Ban Kamthieng

MUSEUM

(บ้านคำเที่ยง; Map p92; Siam Society, 131 Soi Asoke/Soi 21, Th Sukhumvit; admission adult/child 100/50B; ☀9am-5pm Tues-Sat; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) An engaging house museum, Ban Kamthieng transports visitors to a northern Thai village complete with informative displays of daily rituals, folk beliefs and everyday household chores, all within the setting of a traditional wooden house. This museum is operated by and shares space with the Siam Society, the publisher of the renowned *Journal of the Siam Society* and a valiant preserver of traditional Thai culture.

Khlong Toey Market

FOOD MARKET

(ตลาดคลองเตย; Map p92; cnr Th Ratchadaphisek & Th Phra Ram IV; ☀5-10am; MRT Khlong Toei) This wholesale market, one of the city's largest, is inevitably the origin of many of the meals you'll eat during your stay in Bangkok. Get there early, and although some corners of the market can't exactly be described as photogenic, be sure to bring a camera to capture the stacks of durians or cheery fishmongers.

GREATER BANGKOK

Bangkok's 'burbs cover a lot of land, but a minimum of visit-worthy sites. The most worthwhile area is Dusit, the royal district of wide streets, monuments and greenery.

DON'T MISS**JIM THOMPSON HOUSE**

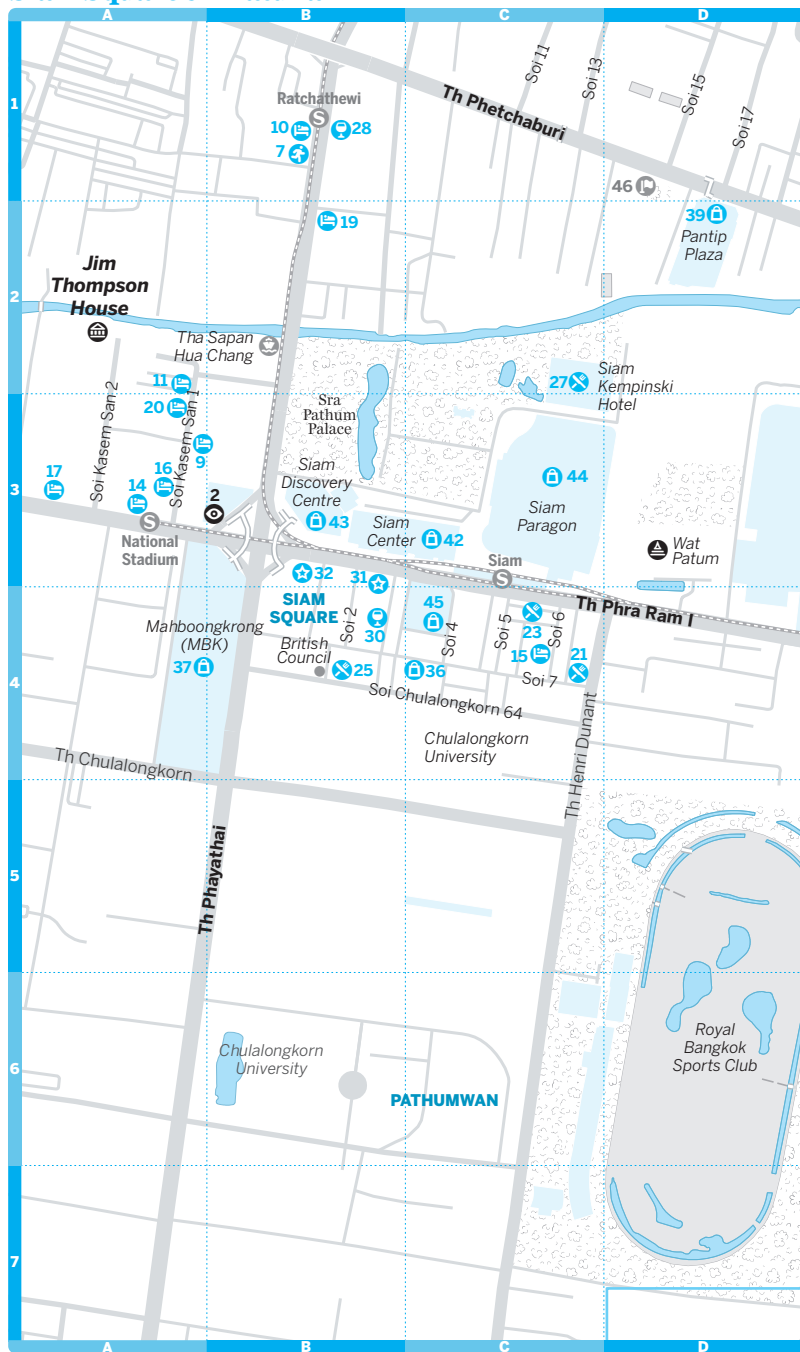
This leafy **compound** (Map p86; www.jimthompsonhouse.com; 6 Soi Kasem San 2; adult/child 100/50B; ☀9am-5pm, compulsory tours in English & French every 20min; BTS National Stadium, klong taxi Tha Saphan Hua Chang) is the former home of the eponymous American silk entrepreneur and art collector. Born in Delaware in 1906, Thompson briefly served in the Office of Strategic Services (forerunner of the CIA) in Thailand during WWII. Settling in Bangkok after the war, his neighbours' handmade silk caught his eye and piqued his business sense; he sent samples to fashion houses in Milan, London and Paris, gradually building a steady worldwide clientele.

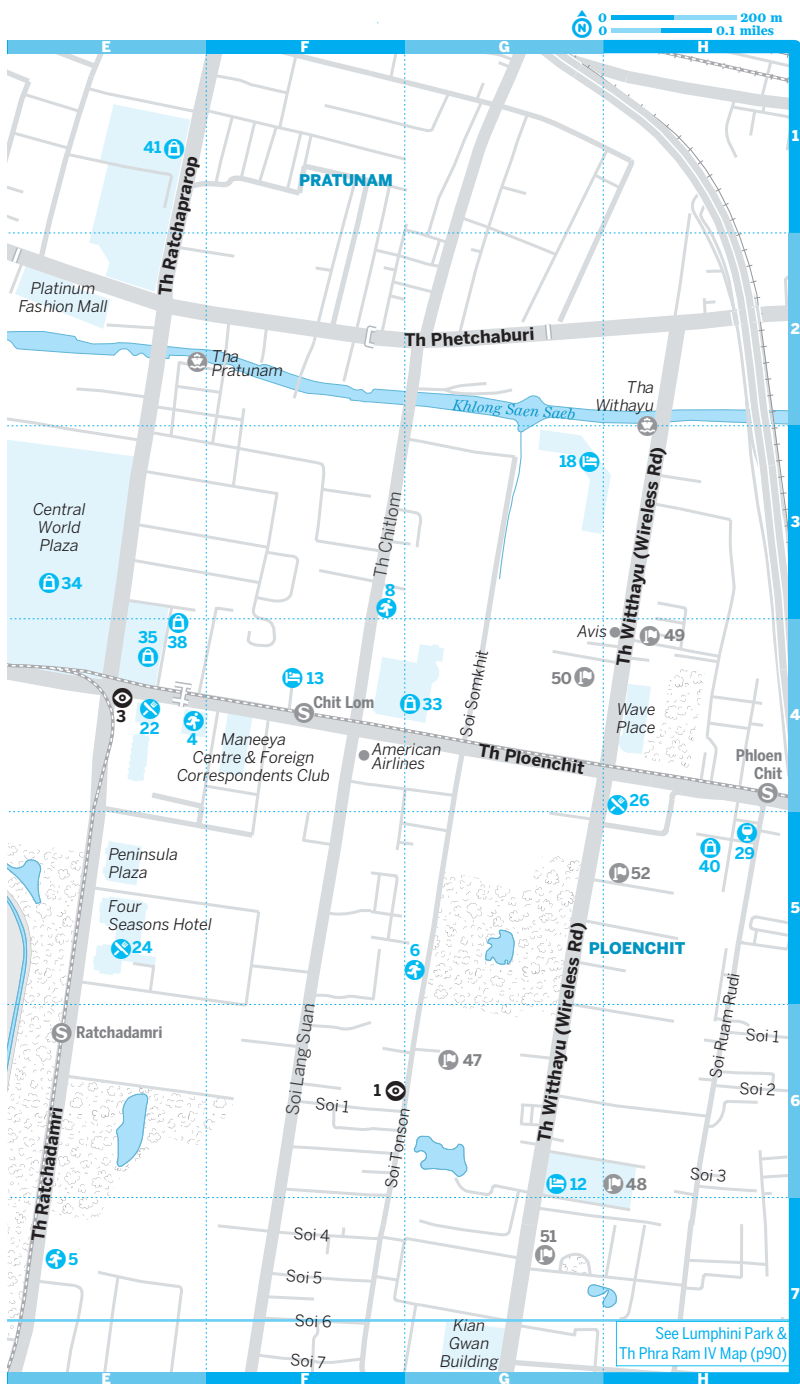
In addition to exquisite Asian art, Thompson also collected parts of various derelict Thai homes in central Thailand and had them reassembled in their current location in 1959. One striking departure from tradition is the way each wall has its exterior side facing the house's interior, thus exposing the wall's bracing system. His small but splendid Asian art collection and his personal belongings are also on display in the main house.

Thompson's story doesn't end with his informal reign as Bangkok's best-adapted foreigner. While out for an afternoon walk in the Cameron Highlands of western Malaysia in 1967, Thompson mysteriously disappeared. That same year his sister was murdered in the USA, fuelling various conspiracy theories. Was it communist spies? Business rivals? Or a man-eating tiger? The most recent theory – for which there is apparently some hard evidence – has it that the silk magnate was accidentally run over by a Malaysian truck driver who hid his remains. *Jim Thompson: The Unsolved Mystery*, by William Warren, is an excellent book on Thompson, his career, residence and subsequent intriguing disappearance.

Siam Square & Pratunam

BANGKOK





See Lumpini Park &
Th Phra Ram IV Map (p90)

Siam Square Pratunam

📍 Top Sights

Jim Thompson House A2

📍 Sights

- 1 100 Tonson Gallery F6
 2 Bangkok Art & Culture Centre B3
 3 Erawan Shrine E4
 Lingam Shrine at Nai Lert
 Park (see 18)

📍 Activities, Courses & Tours

- AAA Thai Language Center (see 8)
 4 Absolute Yoga E4
 5 American University Alumni
 Language Centre E7
 Asian Oasis (see 18)
 Krung Sri IMAX (see 44)
 Siam Ocean World (see 44)
 6 Spa 1930 G5
 Thann Sanctuary (see 35)
 Thann Sanctuary (see 43)
 7 Union Language School B1
 8 Yoga Elements Studio F3

📍 Sleeping

- 9 A-One Inn A3
 10 Asia Hotel B1
 11 Bed & Breakfast Inn A2
 12 Conrad Hotel Bangkok G6
 13 Golden House F4
 14 Lub*d A3
 15 Novotel Bangkok on Siam
 Square C4
 16 Reno Hotel A3
 17 Siam@Siam A3
 18 Swissôtel Nai Lert Park G3
 19 Vie B2
 20 Wendy House A3

📍 Eating

- 21 Coca Suki C4
 22 Crystal Jade La Mian Xiao
 Long Bao E4
 Erawan Tea Room (see 22)
 23 Food Stalls C4
 24 Four Seasons Hotel E5
 MBK Food Court (see 37)

- 25 New Light Coffee House B4
 26 Sanguan Sri H4
 27 Sra Bua C2

📍 Drinking

- 28 Co-co Walk B1
 29 Hyde & Seek H5
 RedSky (see 34)
 Roof (see 17)
 30 To-Sit B4

📍 Entertainment

- Calypso Cabaret (see 10)
 Diplomat Bar (see 12)
 31 Lido B3
 Rock Pub (see 28)
 32 Scala B3

📍 Shopping

- Asia Books (see 43)
 33 Central Chit Lom G4
 34 Central World Plaza E3
 Flynow (see 35)
 35 Gaysorn Plaza E4
 It's Happened to be a Closet (see 44)
 Kinokuniya (see 44)
 36 Marco Tailors C4
 37 MBK Center A4
 38 Narai Phand E4
 39 Pantip Plaza D2
 40 Pinky Tailors H5
 41 Pratunam Market E1
 42 Siam Center C3
 43 Siam Discovery Center B3
 44 Siam Paragon C3
 45 Siam Square C4
 Tango (see 35)

📍 Information

- 46 Indonesian Embassy D1
 47 Netherlands Embassy G6
 48 New Zealand Embassy H6
 South African Embassy (see 48)
 49 Swiss Embassy H4
 50 UK Embassy G4
 51 US Embassy G7
 52 Vietnamese Embassy H5

Wat Benchamabophit

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(วัดเบญจมบพิตร (วัดบุญจาฯ); Map p96; cnr Th Si Ayuthaya & Th Phra Ram V; admission 20B; ☀8am-6pm; bus 72, 503) You might recognise this temple from the back of the 5B coin. Made of white Carrara marble, Wat Ben, as it's col-

loqually known, was built in the late 19th century under Rama V. The large cruciform *bòht* is a prime example of modern Thai wát architecture. The base of the central Buddha image, a copy of Phitsanulok's Phra Phuttha Chinnarat, contains the ashes of Rama V. The

courtyard behind the *bòht* exhibits 53 Buddha images (33 originals and 20 copies) representing famous figures and styles from all over Thailand and other Buddhist countries.

Dusit Palace Park

ROYAL PALACE

(วังสวนกุหลาบ; Map p96; bounded by Th Ratchawithi, Th U-Thong Nai & Th Ratchasima; adult/child 100/50B or free with Grand Palace ticket; ☎9.30am-4pm; bus 18, 28, 515) Following Rama V's first European tour in 1897 (he was the first Thai monarch to visit the continent), he returned home with visions of European castles swimming in his head and set about transforming these styles into a uniquely Thai expression, today's Dusit Palace Park. The royal palace, throne hall and minor palaces for extended family were all moved here from Ko Ratanakosin, the ancient royal court. Today the current king has yet another home and this complex now holds a house museum and other cultural collections.

Originally constructed on Ko Si Chang in 1868 and moved to the present site in 1910, **Vimanmaek Teak Mansion** contains 81 rooms, halls and anterooms, and is said to be the world's largest golden-teak building, allegedly built without the use of a single nail. The mansion was the first permanent building on the Dusit Palace grounds, and served as Rama V's residence in the early

1900s. The interior of the mansion contains various personal effects of the king and a treasure trove of early Ratanakosin art objects and antiques. Compulsory tours (in English) leave every half-hour between 9.45am and 3.15pm, and last about an hour.

The nearby **Ancient Cloth Museum** presents a beautiful collection of traditional silks and cottons that make up the royal cloth collection.

Originally built as a throne hall for Rama V in 1904, the smaller **Abhisek Dusit Throne Hall** is typical of the finer architecture of the era. Victorian-influenced gingerbread architecture and Moorish porticoes blend to create a striking and distinctly Thai exterior. The hall houses an excellent display of regional handiwork crafted by members of the Promotion of Supplementary Occupations & Related Techniques (Support) foundation, an organisation sponsored by Queen Sirikit.

Near the Th U-Thong Nai entrance, two large stables that once housed three white elephants – animals whose auspicious albinism automatically make them crown property – are now the **Royal Elephant Museum**. One of the structures contains artefacts and photos outlining the importance of elephants in Thai history and explaining their various rankings according to

THE CHINESE INFLUENCE

In many ways Bangkok is as much a Chinese city as it is Thai. The presence of the Chinese in Bangkok dates back to before the founding of the city, when Thonburi Si Mahasamut was little more than a Chinese trading outpost on the Chao Phraya River. In the 1780s, during the construction of the new capital under Rama I, Hokkien, Teochiew and Hakka Chinese were hired as coolies and labourers. The Chinese already living in the area were relocated to the districts of Yaowarat and Sampeng, today known as Bangkok's Chinatown.

During the reign of King Rama I, many Chinese began to move up in status and wealth. They controlled many of Bangkok's shops and businesses, and because of increased trading ties with China, were responsible for an immense expansion in Thailand's market economy. Visiting Europeans during the 1820s were astonished by the number of Chinese trading ships in the Chao Phraya River, and some assumed that the Chinese formed the majority of Bangkok's population.

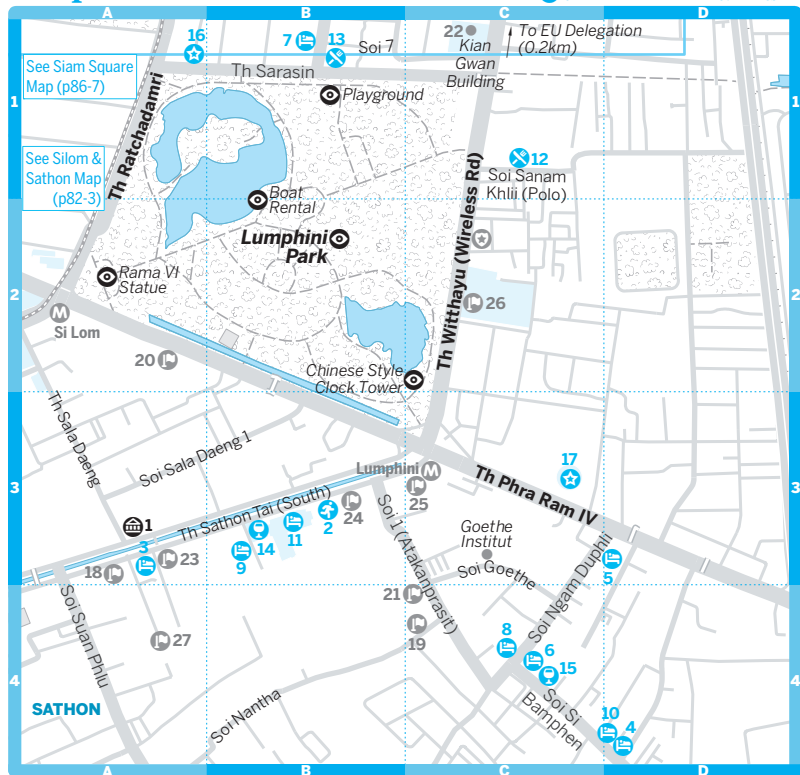
The newfound wealth of certain Chinese trading families created one of Thailand's first elite classes that was not directly related to royalty. Known as *jòw sǎo-a*, these 'merchant lords' eventually obtained additional status by accepting official posts and royal titles, as well as offering their daughters to the royal family. Today it is thought that more than half of the people in Bangkok can claim some Chinese ancestry.

During the reign of Rama III, the Thai capital began to absorb many elements of Chinese food, design, fashion and literature. The growing ubiquity of Chinese culture, coupled with the tendency of the Chinese men to marry Thai women and assimilate into Thai culture, meant that by the beginning of the 20th century there was relatively little that distinguished many Chinese from their Siamese counterparts.

Lumphini Park & Th Phra Ram IV

 0 400 m
0 0.2 miles

BANGKOK



physical characteristics. The second stable holds a sculptural representation of a living royal white elephant (now kept at the Chitlada Palace, home to the current Thai king). Draped in royal vestments, the statue is more or less treated as a shrine by the visiting Thai public.

Because this is royal property, visitors should wear long pants (no capri pants) or long skirts and shirts with sleeves.

Rama V Memorial

MONUMENT

(พระบรมรูปทรงม้า; Map p96; Royal Plaza, Th U-Thong Nai; bus 18, 28, 515) A bronze figure of a military-garbed leader may seem like an unlikely shrine, but Bangkokians are comfortable with their expression of religious devotion. Most importantly, the figure is no forgotten general – this is Rama V (King Chulalongkorn; 1868–1910), who is widely credited for steering the country into the modern age and for preserving Thailand's independence from European colonialism. He is also con-

sidered a champion of the common person for his abolition of slavery and *corvée* (the requirement that every citizen be available for state labour when called). His accomplishments are so revered, especially by the middle class, that his statue attracts worshippers (particularly on Tuesdays, the day of his birth), who make offerings of candles, flowers (predominantly pink roses), incense and bottles of whisky. The statue is also the site of a huge celebration on 23 October, the anniversary of the monarch's death.

The domed neoclassical building behind the statue is **Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall** (Map p96; www.artsofthekingdom.com; Th U-Thong Nai; admission 150B; ☎10am–6pm Tue–Sun), originally built as a royal reception hall during the reign of Rama V, but not completed until 1915, five years after his death. Today the building houses an exhibit called Arts of the Kingdom, which like the nearby Abhisek Dusit Throne Hall, displays

Lumphini Park & Th Phra Ram IV

📍 Top Sights

Lumphini Park B2

📍 Sights

1 Surapon Gallery A3

🎨 Activities, Courses & Tours

2 Siri Pattana Thai Language School B3

🏠 Sleeping

3 All Seasons Sathorn A3

4 Café des Arts Guest House D4

5 ETZzz Hostel D3

6 Ibis Sathon C4

7 Luzz XL B1

8 Malaysia Hotel C4

9 Metropolitan B3

10 Penguin House D4

11 Sukhothai Hotel B3

🍴 Eating

Café 1912 (see 23)

12 Kai Thort Jay Kee C1
nahm (see 9)

13 Ngwan Lee Lang Suan B1
Sukhothai Hotel (see 11)

🍷 Drinking

14 Moon Bar at Vertigo B3

15 Wong's Place C4

🎭 Entertainment

16 Brown Sugar A1

17 Lumphini Stadium C3

📍 Information

Alliance Française (see 23)

18 Australian Embassy A3

19 Austrian Embassy C4

20 Canadian Embassy A2

21 Danish Embassy C4

22 Diethelm Travel C1

23 French Consulate A3

24 German Embassy B3

25 Irish Embassy C3

26 Japanese Embassy C2

27 Malaysian Embassy A4

the products of Queen Sirikit's Support foundation.

🆓 National Library

LIBRARY, MUSEUM

(Map p96; ☎0 2281 5212; Th Samsen; ☀9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun; river ferry Tha Thewet) Has few foreign-language resources, but the library's strength is in its astrological books and star charts, as well as recordings by the king and sacred palm-leaf writings and ancient maps.

🏛️ Suan Phakkad Palace Museum

MUSEUM

(วังสวนผักกาด; Map p97; ☎0 2245 4934; Th Sri Ayuthaya; admission 100B; ☀9am-4pm; BTS Phaya Thai) An overlooked treasure, Suan Phakkad is a collection of eight traditional wooden Thai houses that was once the residence of Princess Chumbon of Nakhon Sawan and before that a lettuce farm – hence the name. Within the still buildings are displays of art, antiques and furnishings, and the landscaped grounds are a peaceful oasis complete with ducks, swans and a semi-enclosed garden.

The diminutive **Lacquer Pavilion**, at the back of the complex, dates from the Ayuthaya period and features gold-leaf *jataka* and *Ramayana* murals, as well as scenes

from daily Ayuthaya life. The building originally sat in a monastery compound on Mae Nam Chao Phraya, just south of Ayuthaya. Larger residential structures at the front of the complex contain displays of Khmer-style Hindu and Buddhist art, Ban Chiang ceramics and a very interesting collection of historic Buddhas, including a beautiful late U Thong-style image.

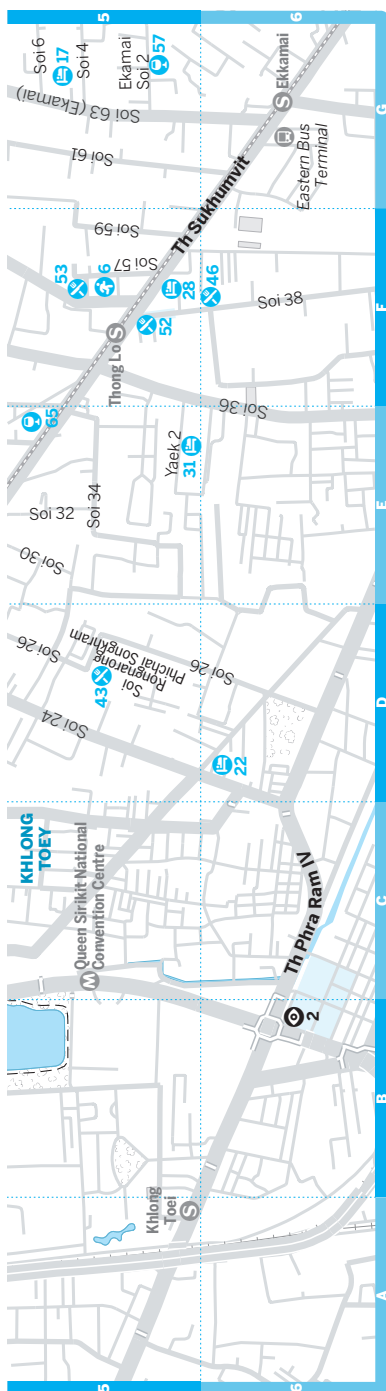


Activities

Traditional Massage

A good massage is the birthright of every Bangkokian, and the joy of every visitor. Correspondingly, places offering massage are everywhere in Bangkok, and they range in quality, depending largely if they offer massage or 'massage'. To avoid the latter, stay clear of the places that advertise via scantily dressed women.

If it's your first time in the hands of a Thai masseur/masseuse, discard any preconceived notions, as many visitors find authentic Thai massage equal parts painful and relaxing. A traditional Thai massage often also involves herbal heat compresses (oil treatments are typically associated with 'sexy' massage).



Health Land

SPA, MASSAGE

(www.healthlandspa.com; Thai massage 2 hours 450B) Ekamai (Map p92; ☎0 2392 2233; 96/1 Soi 10, Soi 63/Ekamai, Th Sukhumvit; ☎9am-11pm; BTS Ekamai); Sathon (Map p82; ☎0 2637 8883; 120 Th Sathon Neua; ☎9am-11pm; BTS Chong Nonsi); Sukhumvit (Map p92; ☎0 2261 1110; 55/5 Soi 21/Asoke, Th Sukhumvit; ☎9am-midnight; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) A winning formula of affordable prices, expert treatments and pleasant facilities has created a small empire of Health Land centres.

Wat Pho Thai Traditional Medical and Massage School

MASSAGE

(Map p60; ☎0 2622 3550; Soi Penphat, Th Sanam Chai; Thai massage per hr 220B; ☎8am-6pm; bus 123, 508, river ferry Tha Tien) The primary training ground for the masseuses who are deployed across the country; there are also massage pavilions inside the temple complex (see p59) and lessons are available (p100).

Asia Herb Association

MASSAGE

(www.asiaherbassociation.com; Thai massage per hr 350B) Phrom Phong (Map p92; ☎0 2260 8864; 33/1 Soi 24, Th Sukhumvit; ☎10am-9pm; BTS Phrom Phong); Sawastdi (Map p92; ☎0 2261 2201; 20/1 Soi 31/Sawastdi, Th Sukhumvit; ☎9am-midnight; BTS Phrom Phong); Thong Lor (Map p92; ☎0 2392 3631; 58/19-25 Soi 55/Thong Lor, Th Sukhumvit; ☎9am-midnight; BTS Thong Lo) With several branches along Th Sukhumvit, this Japanese-owned chain specialises in massage using *prà-kóp*, traditional Thai herbal compresses filled with 18 different herbs.

Ruen-Nuad Massage Studio

MASSAGE

(Map p82; ☎0 2632 2662; 42 Th Convent; Thai massage per hr 350B; ☎10am-9pm; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) Set in a refurbished wooden house, this charming place successfully avoids both the tackiness and New Agedness that characterise most Bangkok massage joints. Prices are affordable too.

Th Sukhumvit is home to several recommended and reputable massage studios, including:

Coran Boutique Spa

MASSAGE

(Map p92; ☎0 2651 1588; www.coranbangkok.com; 27/1-2 Soi 13, Th Sukhumvit; Thai massage per hr 400B; ☎11am-10pm; BTS Nana)

Lavana

MASSAGE

(Map p92; ☎0 2229 4510; www.lavanabangkok.com; 4 Soi 12, Th Sukhumvit; Thai massage per hr 450B; ☎9am-11pm; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit)

Th Sukhumvit

📍 Sights

- 1 Ban Kamthieng C2
2 Khlong Toey Market B6

🏠 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 3 ABC Amazing Bangkok Cyclists D4
4 Asia Herb Association D4
5 Asia Herb Association D3
6 Asia Herb Association F5
7 Baan Dalah B2
8 Bangkok Bike Rides E2
9 Coran Boutique Spa B1
10 Divana Spa C3
11 Health Land C2
12 Health Land G4
13 Lavana B3
14 Pro Language B2
15 Rakuten D3
16 World Fellowship of Buddhists D4

🛏 Sleeping

- 17 72 Ekamai G5
18 Ariyasom Villa A1
19 Atlanta A3
20 Baan Sukhumvit C3
21 Bed Bangkok A1
22 Davis D6
23 Dream Bangkok B2

- 24 Eugenia D2
25 Federal Hotel B1
26 Fusion Suites C2
27 Golden Palace Hotel A1
28 HI-Sukhumvit F5
29 Ma Du Zi C3
30 Nana Chart Hotel C3
31 Napa Place E5
32 S31 D3
33 Sacha's Hotel Uno C2
34 Seven D3
35 Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit B3
36 Silq C2
37 Soi 1 Guesthouse A1
38 Stable Lodge B2
Suk 11 (see 55)
39 Swiss Park Hotel B2

🍴 Eating

- 40 Bacco - Osteria da Sergio F4
Bed Supperclub (see 66)
41 Bei Otto C3
42 Bharani C2
43 Bo.lan D5
44 Boon Tong Kiat Singapore
Hainanese Chicken Rice G3
45 Duc de Praslin D3
46 Face F6

Rakuten

MASSAGE

(Map p92; ☎0 2258 9433; www.rakutenspa.com; 94 Soi 33, Th Sukhumvit; Thai massage per hr 250B; ☀noon-midnight; BTS Phrom Phong)

Baan Dalah

MASSAGE

(Map p92; ☎0 2653 3358; www.baandalahmindbodyspa.com; 2 Soi 8, Th Sukhumvit; Thai massage per hr 350B; ☀10am-midnight; BTS Nana)

Spas

Unless you've spent your entire visit in an air-conditioned bubble (entirely possible in today's Bangkok), at some point you're going to need to rid yourself of the negative effects of the city's urban environment. This can take the form of a simple scrub or can involve multistage treatments involving a customised choice of aromas and oils, a team of staff and possibly even acupuncture needles. There are countless spas in Bangkok now, many of them located in the city's high-end hotels with high-end price tags to match. To round down your choices, visit www.spasinbangkok.com or consider one of the following:

Oriental Spa

SPA

(Map p80; ☎0 2659 9000; www.mandarinoriental.com/bangkok/spa; Oriental Hotel; spa packages from 2900B; ☀9am-10pm; hotel shuttle boat from Tha Sathon/Central Pier) Regarded as among the premier spas in the world, the Oriental Spa also set the standard for Asian-style spa treatment. Depending on where you flew in from, the Jet Lag Massage might be a good option, but all treatments require advance booking.

Thann Sanctuary

SPA

(www.thann.info; spa treatments from 1400B) Gaysorn Plaza (Map p86; ☎0 2656 1424; 3rd fl, Gaysorn Plaza, cnr Th Phoenchit & Th Ratchadamri; ☀10am-10pm; BTS Chit Lom); Siam Discovery Center (Map p86; ☎0 2258 0550; 5th fl, Siam Discovery Center, cnr Th Phra Ram I & Th Phayathai; ☀10am-9pm; BTS Siam) An offshoot of the fragrant herbal health products brand, these dark day spas offer a variety of treatments for those needing some post-shopping therapy.

47 JW Marriott.....	A2	67 Ekamai Soi 5.....	G4
48 Le Beaulieu.....	C2	68 Glow.....	C2
Mokkori.....	(see 53)	Living Room.....	(see 35)
Myeong Ga.....	(see 54)	69 Nung-Len.....	G4
49 Nasir Al-Masri.....	A2	70 Q Bar.....	B1
50 Rang Mahal.....	C4	71 Scratch Dog.....	C3
Scoozi.....	(see 71)	72 Titanium.....	C3
51 Serenade.....	G3		
52 Soi 38 Night Market.....	F5	G Shopping	
53 Soul Food Mahanakorn.....	F5	73 Asia Books.....	B2
54 Sukhumvit Plaza.....	B2	74 Dasa Book Café.....	E4
55 Tapas Café.....	B2	75 Emporium Shopping Centre.....	D4
56 Thonglee.....	C4	Kinokuniya.....	(see 75)
		76 Nandakwang.....	C2
☉ Drinking		77 Nickermann's.....	A2
57 Bangkok Bar.....	G5	78 Raja's Fashions.....	A2
58 Bull's Head.....	D3	79 Sop Moei Arts.....	E3
59 Cheap Charlie's.....	B2	80 Th Sukhumvit Market.....	B2
60 Fat Gut'z.....	G3	81 Thai Craft Fair.....	C3
61 HOB'S.....	G3		
62 Iron Fairies.....	G3	i Information	
63 Long Table.....	C3	82 Bumrungrad Hospital.....	A1
64 Nest.....	B1	83 Indian Embassy.....	C1
65 WTF.....	E5	Indian Visa Application Centre.....	(see 81)
		84 Israeli Embassy.....	C1
★ Entertainment		85 Philippines Embassy.....	E4
66 Bed Supperclub.....	B1	86 Samitivej Hospital.....	E3
Club Insomnia.....	(see 14)	87 Spanish Embassy.....	C4

Spa 1930

SPA
(Map p86; ☎ 0 2254 8606; www.spa1930.com; Soi Tonson, Th Ploenchit; spa treatments from 3800B; ☉ 9.30am-9.30pm; BTS Chit Lom) It rescues relaxers from the contrived spa ambience of New Age music and ingredients you'd rather see at a dinner party. The menu is simple (face, body care and body massage) and all scrubs and massage oils are based on traditional Thai herbal remedies.

Divana Massage & Spa

SPA
(Map p92; ☎ 0 2261 6784; www.divanaspa.com; 7 Soi 25, Th Sukhumvit; spa treatments from 2500B; ☉ 11am-11pm Mon-Fri, 10-11am Sat & Sun; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) This place retains a unique Thai touch with a private and soothing setting in a garden house.

Sports & Yoga Facilities

If you're dedicated to the cause of athletic pursuits in this energy-sucking climate, you need access to an air-conditioned facility. Most membership gyms and top-end hotels have fitness centres and swimming pools.

Some hotels offer day-use fees but these policies vary per establishment.

Clark Hatch Physical Fitness Centers (www.clarkhatchthailand.com) is a top-class operation with more than 14 locations throughout the city. All branches have weight machines, aerobics classes, pool, sauna and massage.

Other commercial gyms include **California Wow** (www.californiawowx.com), with seven branches, and **Fitness First** (www.fitnessfirst.co.th), with 15.

Hash House Harriers

RUNNING

(www.bangkokhth.com) One of Bangkok's longest-running sports groups is the Hash House Harriers, who pride themselves both on their dedication to running and their ability to subdue dehydration with massive amounts of beer. If you've got commitment issues with either pursuit, start with a simple jog at a local park, such as Lumpini (p85).

Yoga Elements Studio

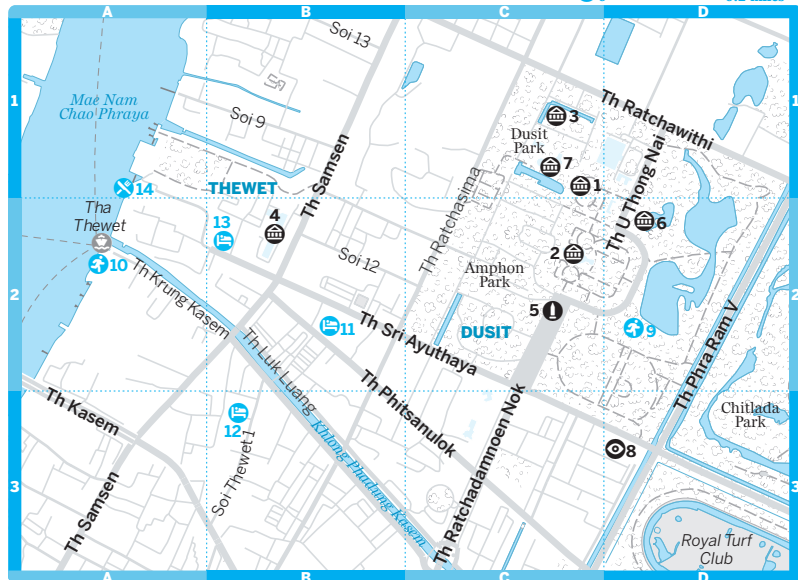
YOGA

(Map p86; ☎ 0 2655 5671; www.yogaelements.com; 23rd fl, 29 Vanissa Bldg, Th Chitlom; BTS Chit

Thewet & Dusit

0 400 m
0 0.2 miles

BANGKOK



Thewet & Dusit

📍 Sights

- 1 Abhisek Dusit Throne Room C1
- 2 Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall C2
- 3 Dusit Palace Park C1
- 4 National Library B2
- 5 Rama V Memorial C2
- 6 Royal Elephant Museum D2
- 7 Vimanmek Teak Mansion
Museum C1
- 8 Wat Benchamabophit D3

🐾 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 9 Dusit Zoo D2
- 10 Tha Thewet A2

🛏 Sleeping

- 11 Bangkok International Youth
Hostel B2
- 12 Phra-Nakorn Norn-Len B3
- Shanti Lodge (see 13)
- 13 Sri Ayuttaya Guest House B2
- Taewez Guesthouse (see 13)

🍴 Eating

- 14 Kaloang Home Kitchen A1

Lom) Emphasises a vinyasa flow practice with attractive rates.

Absolute Yoga

YOGA

(Map p86; ☎ 0 2252 4400; www.absoluteyoga.com; 4th fl, Amarin Plaza, Th Ploenchit; BTS Chit Lom) It offers yoga for the gym rat, not the spiritualist, with classes in hot yoga, Pilates and vinyasa.



Courses

Cooking and language courses dominate Bangkok's continuing-education syllabus.

Cooking

Imagine the points you'll rack up if you can make authentic Thai dishes for your friends back at home. A visit to a Thai cooking school has become a must-do for many Bangkok itineraries, and for some visitors it's a highlight of their trip.

Courses range in price and value, but a typical half-day course should include at least a basic introduction to Thai ingredients and flavours, and a hands-on chance to both prepare and cook several dishes. Most schools offer a revolving cast of dishes that

changes on a daily basis, making it possible to study for a week without repeating the cooking of a dish. Many courses include a visit to a market, and nearly all lessons include a set of printed recipes and end with a communal lunch consisting of your handiwork.

Khao

COOKERY COURSE

(Map p60; ☎08 9111 0947; www.khaocooking school.com; D&D Plaza, 68-70 Th Khao San; lessons 1500B; ☀9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.30pm) Although it's located smack dab in the middle of Khao San, this new cooking school was started up by an authority on Thai food and features instruction on a wide variety of authentic dishes. Located in the courtyard behind D&D Inn.

Helping Hands

COOKERY COURSE

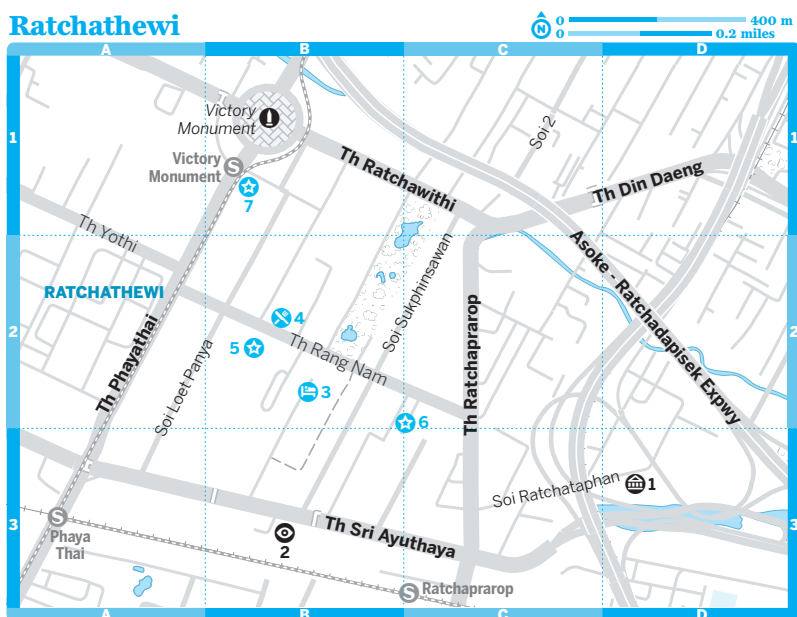
(☎08 4901 8717; www.cookingwithpoo.com) This popular cookery course was started by a native of Khlong Toey's slums and is held in her neighbourhood. Courses, which must be booked in advance, span four dishes and include a visit to Khlong Toey Market and transport to and from Emporium (p137).

Baipai Thai Cooking School

COOKERY COURSE

(Map p56; ☎0 2561 1404; www.baipai.com; 8/91 Soi 54, Th Ngam Wong Wan; lessons 1800B; ☀9.30am-1.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Tue-Sat) Housed in an attractive suburban villa, and taught by a small army of staff, Baipai offers two daily lessons of four dishes each. Transport is available.

Ratchathewi



Ratchathewi

📍 Sights

- 1 Bangkok Doll Factory & Museum..... D3
2 Suan Phakkad Palace Museum..... B3

🛏 Sleeping

- 3 Pullman Bangkok King Power..... B2

🍴 Eating

- 4 Mallika..... B2

🎭 Entertainment

- 5 Aksra Theatre..... B2
6 Raintree..... C2
7 Saxophone Pub & Restaurant..... B1

BANGKOK FOR CHILDREN

There aren't a whole lot of attractions in Bangkok meant directly to appeal to the little ones, but there's no lack of locals willing to provide attention. The website www.bambiweb.org is a useful resource for parents in Bangkok.

Housing a colourful selection of traditional Thai dolls, both new and antique, is the **Bangkok Doll Factory & Museum** (Map p97; ☎0 2245 3008; 85 Soi Ratchaphataphan/Mo Leng; admission free; ☀8am-5pm Mon-Sat; BTS Ratchaprarop). The downside is that it can be really hard to find. Approach via Th Si Ayuthaya heading east. Cross under the expressway past the intersection with Th Ratchaprarop and take the soi to the right of the post office. Follow this windy street until you start seeing signs.

Disguising learning as kid's play, most activities at the **Children's Discovery Museum** (Map p118; www.bkkchildrenmuseum.com; Queen Sirikit Park, Th Kamphaengphet 4; adult/child 70/50B; ☀9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) are geared to early elementary-aged children. There is also a toddler-aged playground at the back of the main building. Note that the museum was closed for renovations at the time of research, and was scheduled to re-open in late 2011. It's opposite Chatuchak Weekend Market.

Although not specifically child-targeted, the **Museum of Siam** (p63) has lots of interactive exhibits that will appeal to children.

Dusit Zoo (Map p96; Th Ratchawithi; adult/child 100/50B; ☀8am-6pm; bus 18, 28, 515) covers 19 hectares with caged exhibits of more than 300 mammals, 200 reptiles and 800 birds, including relatively rare indigenous species such as banteng, gaur, serow and some rhinoceros. There are shady grounds plus a lake in the centre with paddleboats for hire and a small children's playground.

A massive underwater world has been re-created at the **Siam Ocean World** (Map p86; www.siamoceanworld.co.th; basement, Siam Paragon, Th Phra Ram I; adult/child 900/700B; ☀10am-9pm; BTS Siam) shopping-centre aquarium. Gaze into the glass-enclosed deep-reef zone or view the daily feeding of penguins and sharks.

Lumphini Park (p85) is a trusty ally in the cool hours of the morning and evening for kite-flying (in season) as well as for stretching the legs and lungs. Nearby, kids can view lethal snakes become reluctant altruists at the adjacent antivenin-producing **Queen Saovabha Memorial Institute** (p79) snake farm.

Further afield, **Siam Park City** (Map p153; 203 Th Suansiam, Khannayao; ☎0 2919 7200; www.siamparkcity.com; Th Ratchawithi; admission 100-600B; ☀10am-6pm) and **Dream World** (Map p153; ☎0 2533 1152; www.dreamworld-th.com; 62 Moo 1, Th Rangsit-Nakornnayok, Patumthani; admission from 450B; ☀10am-6pm) are expansive amusement parks. Siam Park City features more than 30 rides and a water park with the largest wave pool in the world, while Dream World features a snow room. Both lie north of Bangkok and are accessible by taxi from Mo Chit BTS station (Map p118).

Join the novice monks and other children as they sprinkle tiny pellets of fish food (which are sold on the pier) into the river at **Tha Thewet** (Map p96; Th Samsen; ☀7am-7pm, bus 32, 315, river ferry Tha Thewet), transforming the muddy river into a brisk boil of flapping bodies.

MBK Center (p136) and **Siam Paragon** (p137) both have bowling alleys to keep the older ones occupied. **Krung Sri IMAX** (Map p86; ☎0 2129 4631; www.imaxthai.com; Siam Paragon, Th Phra Ram I; tickets 350-450B; BTS Siam) screens special-effects versions of Hollywood action flicks and nature features.

Blue Elephant Thai Cooking School

COOKERY COURSE

(Map p82; ☎0 2673 9353; www.blueelephant.com; 233 Th Sathon Tai; lessons 2943B; ☀8.45am-1pm & 1.15-4.30pm Mon-Sat; BTS Surasak) Bangkok's most chi-chi Thai cooking school offers two lessons daily. The morning class squeezes in a visit to a local market, while the afternoon

session includes a detailed introduction to Thai ingredients.

Silom Thai Cooking School

COOKERY COURSE

(Map p82; ☎08 4726 5669; www.bangkokthai-cooking.com; 68 Soi 13/Trok Vaithi, Th Silom; lessons 1000B; ☀9.30am-1pm & 1.40-6pm; BTS

Chong Nonsi) The facilities are basic but Silom crams a visit to a local market and instruction of six dishes into three and a half hours, making it the best bang for your baht. Transportation is available.

Meditation

Although at times Bangkok may seem like the most un-Buddhist place on earth, there are several places where foreigners can practise Theravada Buddhist meditation. For background information on Buddhism, see p729; for temple etiquette, see p59 and p34. Additional sources of information include **Dharma Thai** (www.dhammathai.org), which has a rundown on several prominent wát and meditation centres.

House of Dhamma

MEDITATION

(Map p118; ☎ 0 2511 0439; www.houseofdhamma.com; 26/9 Soi 15, Th Lat Prao; MRT Lat Phrao) Helen Jandamit has opened her suburban Bangkok home to meditation retreats and classes in *vipassana* (insight meditation). Check the website to see what workshops are on offer, and be sure to call ahead before making a visit.

Wat Mahathat

MEDITATION

(Map p60; 3 Th Maha Rat; bus 32, 201, 503, river ferry Tha Maharaj or Tha Chang) This temple is home to two independently operating meditation centres. The **International Buddhist Meditation Center** (☎ 0 2222 6011; www.centermeditation.org; Section 5, Wat Mahathat; donations accepted) offers daily meditation classes at 7am, 1pm and 6pm. Taught by English-speaking Phra Suputh, classes last three hours. The **Meditation Study and Retreat Center** (☎ 0 223 6878; www.meditation-watmahadhat.com; Wat Mahathat; donations accepted) offers a regimented daily programme of meditation. With both of these programmes, longer stays, including accommodation and food can be arranged, but students are expected to follow a strict regimen of conduct.

World Fellowship of Buddhists

MEDITATION

(WFB; Map p92; ☎ 0 2661 1284; www.wfb-hq.org; 616 Benjasiri Park, Soi 24, Th Sukhumvit; ☉ 8.30am-4pm Sun-Fri; BTS Phrom Phong) On the first Sunday of the month, this centre of Theravada Buddhism hosts meditation classes in English from 2pm to 5pm. The fellowship also holds interesting forums on Buddhist issues.

Thai Boxing

Training in *moo-ay tai* (also spelt *muay thai*) for foreigners has increased in popularity in the past five years and many camps all over the country are tailoring their programs for English-speaking fighters. The following camps provide instruction in English and accept men and women. Food and accommodation can often be provided for an extra charge. The website www.muaythai.com contains loads of information on training camps.

Muay Thai Institute

THAI BOXING GYM

(Map p153; ☎ 0 2992 0096; www.muaythai-institute.net; Rangsit Stadium, 336/932 Th Prachatiapat, Pathum Thani; tuition for 1st level 8000B; BTS Mo Chit & access by taxi) Associated with the respected World Muay Thai Council, the institute offers a fundamental course (consisting of three levels of expertise), as well as courses for instructors, referees and judges.

Sor Vorapin Gym

THAI BOXING GYM

(Map p60; ☎ 0 2282 3551; www.thaiboxings.com; 13 Th Kasab, Th Chakraphong; tuition per day/month 500/9000B; bus 2, 15, 44, 511, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Specialising in training foreign students of both genders, this gym is sweating distance from Th Khao San. More serious training is held at a gym outside the city.

Fairtex Muay Thai

THAI BOXING GYM

(off Map p153; ☎ 0 2755 3329; www.fairtexbangplee.com; 99/5 Mu 3, Soi Buthamanuson, Th Thaearak, Bangpli, Samut Prakan; tuition & accommodation per day from 1100B; BTS Chong Nonsi & access by taxi) A popular, long-running camp south of Bangkok.

Thai Language

Union Language School

THAI LANGUAGE LESSONS

(Map p86; ☎ 0 2214 6033; www.unionlanguage-school.com; 7th fl, 328 CCT Office Bldg, Th Phayathai; tuition from 7000B; BTS Ratchathewi) Generally recognised as having the best and most rigorous courses (many missionaries study here). Union employs a balance of structure- and communication-oriented methodologies in 80-hour, four-week modules.

American University Alumni Language Centre

THAI LANGUAGE LESSONS

(AUA; Map p86; ☎ 0 2252 8398; www.auathai.com; 179 Th Ratchadamri; tuition per hr 128B; BTS Ratchadamri) This longstanding institute features

various levels of tuition that can be completed within a sliding timescale.

Pro Language

THAI LANGUAGE LESSONS

(Map p92; ☎0 2250 0072; www.prolanguage.co.th; 10th fl, Times Square Bldg, 246 Th Sukhumvit; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit; tuition from 10,00B) A favourite of expat professionals; Pro Language starts with the basics and increases in difficulty to the advanced level, which involves studying examples of Thai literature.

Siri-Pattana Thai Language

School

THAI LANGUAGE LESSONS

(Map p90; ☎0 2677 3150; siri_pattana@hotmai.com; YWCA, 13 Th Sathon Tai; MRT Lumpini; tuition from 7500B) This institute offers Thai-language courses that cover 30 hours broken into one- or two-hour classes per day, as well as preparation for the *Bor hok* (teaching proficiency exam).

AAA Thai Language

Center

THAI LANGUAGE LESSONS

(Map p86; ☎0 2655 5629; www.aaathai.com; 6th fl, 29 Vanissa Bldg, Th Chitlom; BTS Chit Lom) Opened by a group of experienced Thai language teachers from other schools, good-value AAA Thai has a loyal following.

Thai Massage

Wat Pho Thai Traditional

Medical and Massage School

THAI MASSAGE

(Map p60; ☎0 2622 3550; www.watpomassage.com; 392/25-28 Soi Phen Phat; tuition from 5000B; ☉8am-6pm; bus 508, 512, river ferry Tha Tien) Offers basic and advanced courses in traditional Thai massage; basic courses offer 30 hours spread out over five days and cover either general massage or foot massage. The advanced level spans 60 hours, requires the basic course as a prerequisite, and covers therapeutic and healing massage. Other advanced courses include oil massage and aromatherapy, and infant and child massage. The school is outside the temple compound in a restored Bangkok shophouse on unmarked Soi Phen Phat – look for Coconut Palm restaurant.

Tours

If you would like a guide, recommended outfits include **Tour with Tong** (☎0 81835 0240; www.tourwithtong.com; day tour from 1000B), whose team conduct tours in and around Bangkok, and **Thai Private Tour Guide** (☎0 81860 9159; www.thaitourguide.com; day tour from 2000B), where Chob and Mee get good reviews.

See p104 for more specific guided tour experiences.

Boat Tours

RIVER & CANAL TRIPS

Glimpses of Bangkok's past as the 'Venice of the East' are still possible today, even though the motor vehicle has long since become the city's conveyance of choice. Along the river and the canals is a motley fleet of watercraft, from paddled canoes to rice barges. In these areas many homes, trading houses and temples remain oriented towards life on the water, providing a fascinating glimpse into the past when Thais still considered themselves *jôw nám* (water lords).

The most obvious way to commute between riverside attractions is the **Chao Phraya Express** (☎0 2623 6001; www.chao-phraya-boat.co.th; tickets 9-32B). The terminus for most northbound boats is Tha Nonthaburi and for most southbound boats it's Tha Sathon (also called Central Pier), near the Saphan Taksin BTS station, although some boats run as far south as Wat Ratchasingkhon. See p149 for more information about boat travel.

For a more custom view, you might consider chartering a long-tail boat along the city's canals – see boxed text, p101 for details.

DINNER CRUISES

Perfect for romancing couples or subdued families, dinner cruises drift along Mae Nam Chao Phraya basking in the twinkling city lights at night, far away from the heat and noise of town. Cruises range from down-home to sophisticated, but the food generally ranges from mediocre to forgettable.

Loy Nava

DINNER CRUISE

(Map p80; ☎0 2437 4932; www.loynava.com; set menu 1766B; ☉6-8pm & 8.10-10.10pm) Operating since 1970, and quite possibly the original Bangkok dinner cruise, Loy Nava offers two daily excursions, both departing from the Tha Si Phraya, near River City. A vegetarian menu is available.

Manohra Cruises

DINNER CRUISE

(Map p56; ☎0 2477 0770; www.manohracruises.com; Bangkok Marriott Resort & Spa, Thonburi; cocktail cruise, dinner cruise adult/child 2343/1712B; ☉7.30-10pm) Commands a fleet of converted teak rice barges that part the waters with regal flair. Boats depart from the Marriott Resort, accessible via a free river shuttle that operates from Tha Sathon (near BTS Saphan Taksin; see map p80).

Wan Fah Cruises

DINNER CRUISE

(Map p80; ☎0 2222 8679; www.wanfah.in.th; cruises 1200B; ☀7-9pm; river ferry to Tha Si Phraya) Departing from the River City Complex, Wan Fah runs a buxom wooden boat that floats in style with accompanying Thai music and traditional dance. Dinner options include a standard or seafood set menu, and hotel transfer is available.

Yok Yor Restaurant

DINNER CRUISE

(Map p80; ☎0 2439 3477; www.yokyor.co.th; dinner à la carte plus adult/child 140/70B surcharge; ☀8-10pm; river-crossing ferry from Th Sri Phraya) This long-running floating restaurant on the Thonburi side of the river also runs a daily dinner cruise, as well as several boats that can be hired for private functions.

BANG PA-IN & AYUTHAYA CRUISES

A little faster than the days of sailing ships, river cruises from Bangkok north to the ruins of the former royal capital of Ayuthaya (p157) take in all the romance of the river. Most trips include a guided tour of Ayuthaya's ruins with a stop at the summer palace of Bang Pa In (p167). Normally only one leg of the journey between Bangkok and Ayuthaya is aboard a boat, while the return or departing trip is by bus.

Asian Oasis

RIVER CRUISE

(Map p86; ☎0 2655 6246; www.asian-oasis.com; 7th floor, Nai Lert Tower, 2/4 Th Witthayu/Wireless Rd; 2-day trip 6450-10,450B depending on season & direction) Cruise the Chao Phraya River aboard a fleet of restored rice barges with old-world charm and modern conveniences.

Trips include either an upstream or downstream journey to/from Ayuthaya with bus transfer in the opposite direction.

Manohra Cruises

RIVER CRUISE

(Map p56; ☎0 2477 0770; www.manohracruises.com; Bangkok Marriott Resort & Spa, Thonburi; 3-day trip 69,000B) The nautical equivalent of the *Eastern & Oriental Express* train, the *Manohra Song* is a restored teak rice barge decorated with antiques, Persian carpets and four luxury sleeping berths. The trip is a three-day, two-night excursion to Ayuthaya, and the package price is all-inclusive except for tax and service. The *Manohra Dream*, an even more luxurious boat for a maximum of two couples, is also available for longer excursions.

Bicycle & Segway Tours

Although some cycling tours tackle the city's urban neighbourhoods, many take advantage of the nearby lush, undeveloped district to the south known as Phra Pradaeng (Map p56), where narrow walkways crisscross irrigation canals that feed small-scale fruit plantations and simple villages.

To tour the sites of old Bangkok by free borrowed bicycle, see the boxed text, p151.

Grasshopper Adventures

BICYCLE TOURS

(Map p60; ☎0 2280 0832; www.grasshopperadventures.com; 57 Th Ratchadamnoen Klang; tours from 750B; ☀8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri; bus 2, 15, 44, 511, klong taxi Tha Phan Fah) This lauded outfit runs a variety of unique bicycle tours in and

ROLLIN' ON THE...CANAL

For an up-close view of the city's famed canals, long-tail boats are available for hire at Tha Chang, Tha Tian, Tha Oriental and Tha Phra Athit. Prices at Tha Chang are the highest and allow little room for negotiation, but you stand the least chance of being taken for a ride or being hit up for tips and other unexpected fees.

Trips explore the Thonburi canals **Khlong Bangkok Noi** and, further south, **Khlong Bangkok Yai**, taking in the Royal Barges National Museum, Wat Arun and a riverside temple with fish feeding. Longer trips diverge into **Khlong Mon**, between Bangkok Noi and Bangkok Yai, which offers more typical canal scenery, including orchid farms. On weekends, you have the option of visiting the **Taling Chan floating market**. However it's worth pointing out that, to actually disembark and explore any of these sights, the most common tour of one hour (1000B, up to six people) is simply not enough time and you'll most likely need 1½ (1300B) or two hours (1600B). Most operators have set tour routes, but if you have a specific destination in mind, you can request it.

A cheaper alternative is to take the **commuter long-tail boat** (50B; one hour; ☀4pm-7pm) that also departs from Tha Chang, although it's one-way only and you'll have to find your own way back from Bang Yai, located at the distant northern end of Khlong Bangkok Noi.

Exiting the market at Tha Phra Chan, cross Th Maha Rat and continue east, passing even more traditional Thai medicine shops and amulet vendors until you reach **8 Sanam Luang**, the 'Royal Field'. The park is the site for the annual Ploughing Ceremony, in which the King (or, lately, the Crown Prince) officially initiates the rice-growing season, and a large kite competition is also held here during the kite-flying season (mid-February to April).

Cross Th Ratchadamnoen Nai and go north, turning right at the Royal Hotel onto **9 Th Ratchadamnoen Klang**, Bangkok's own Champs Élysées. Continuing east, after the intersection Th Tanao, you'll see the **10 October 14 Memorial**, commemorating the civilian demonstrators who were killed on 14 October 1973 by the military during a prodemocracy rally. Ahead in the distance you'll see the four-pronged **11 Democracy Monument**, erected in 1932 to commemorate Thailand's transformation from absolute to constitutional monarchy. In recent decades, the monument has been a site of huge demonstrations, most notably during 1973 and 1992.

Turn right down Th Din So and continue south until you reach the unmistakable

12 Wat Suthat and Sao Ching-Cha, both lesser-known Bangkok landmarks.

You're well overdue for lunch at this point, but thankfully you're only a couple of blocks west of Th Tanao, one of Bangkok's premier eating areas. Cut through the **13 religious shops** along Th Bamrung Meuang for a pit stop at **14 Poj Spa Kar** or **15 Chote Chitr**.

After lunch, turn left on Th Phraeng Nara, crossing Khlong Lawt, and continue west along Th Lak Meuang until you reach the street's namesake and home of Bangkok's city spirit, **16 Lak Meuang**.

After paying your respects, head south along Th Sanam Chai and turn right onto Th Thai Wang, which will escort you to the entrance of **17 Wat Pho** home of the giant Reclining Buddha and lots of quiet nooks and crannies.

If you've still got the energy, head to adjacent Tha Tien to catch the cross-river ferry to Khmer-influenced **18 Wat Arun**; otherwise end your journey with celebratory drinks at the Arun Residence's rooftop bar.

19 Amorosa – if you're there at the right time, you can catch one of Bangkok's premier sunset views.

around Bangkok, including a night tour and a tour of the city's green zones.

ABC Amazing Bangkok Cyclists

BICYCLE TOURS

(Map p92; ☎0 2665 6364; www.realasia.net; 10/5-7 Soi 26, Th Sukhumvit; tours from 1000B; ☺ tours at 8am, 10am or 1pm; BTS Phrom Phong) Operating for more than a decade, the bike-based tours here purport to reveal the 'real' Asia by following the elevated walkways of the city's rural canals.

Segway Tour Thailand

SEGWAY TOURS

(Map p60; ☎0 2221 4525; www.segwaytourthailand.com; Maharaj Pier Building, Tha Maharaj, off Th Maha Rat; half-day tours from 3500B; ☺ 9.30am-6.30pm Tues-Sun; 32, 201, 503, river ferry Tha Maharaj) This outfit runs half-day and full-day Segway tours of Bangkok and elsewhere, including Ayuthaya.

Bangkok Bike Rides

BICYCLE TOURS

(Map p92; ☎0 2712 5305; www.bangkokbikerides.com; 14/1-B Soi Phromsi 2, off Soi 39/Phrompong, Th Sukhumvit; tours from 1000B; ☺ 8.30am-6.30pm Tue-Sun; BTS Phrom Phong) A division of the tour company Spice Roads, it offers a variety of tours, both urban and rural.

Walking & Speciality Tours

Although the pollution and heat are significant obstacles, Bangkok is a fascinating city to explore on foot. If you'd rather do it with an expert guide, **Bangkok Private Tours** (www.bangkokprivatetours.com; full-day walking tour 3400B) conducts customised walking tours of the city. And foodies may appreciate the offerings at **Bangkok Food Tours** (☎08 9126 3657; www.bangkokfoodtours.com; half-day tour adult/child 950/750B), which offer half-day culinary tours of Bangkok's Bang Rak neighbourhood.

★ Festivals & Events

In addition to the national holidays (see p759), there's always something going on in Bangkok. Check the website of **TAT** (www.tourismthailand.org) or the **Bangkok Information Center** (www.bangkoktourist.com) for exact dates. The cultural centres also host various international festivals.

February & March

Chinese New Year

NEW YEAR

Thai-Chinese celebrate the lunar New Year with a week of housecleaning, lion dances and fireworks. Most festivities centre on Chinatown. Dates vary.

Kite-Flying Season

KITE-FLYING

During the windy season (March), colourful kites battle it out over the skies of Sanam Luang and Lumpini Park.

April & May

Songkran

NEW YEAR

The celebration of the Thai New Year has morphed into a water war with high-powered water guns and water balloons being launched at unsuspecting and unsuspecting participants. The most intense water battles take place on Th Khao San. Held in mid-April.

Royal Ploughing Ceremony

PLANTING CEREMONY

His Majesty the King (or lately the Crown Prince) commences rice-planting season with a ceremony at Sanam Luang. Held in May; dates vary.

August

Queen's Birthday

MOTHER'S DAY

The queen's birthday is recognised as Mother's Day throughout the country. In Bangkok, festivities centre on Th Ratchadamnoen and the Grand Palace. Held on 12 August.

September & October

Vegetarian Festival

FOOD FESTIVAL

A 10-day Chinese-Buddhist festival wheels out yellow-bannered streetside vendors serving meatless meals. The greatest concentration of vendors is found in Chinatown. Dates vary.

International Festival of Music & Dance

MUSIC & DANCE FESTIVAL

(www.bangkokfestivals.com) An extravaganza of arts and culture sponsored by the Thailand Cultural Centre. Held September or October.

King Chulalongkorn Day

ROYAL EVENT

Rama V is honoured on the anniversary of his death at the Royal Plaza in Dusit. Crowds of devotees come to make merit with incense and flower garlands. Held on 23 October.

November

Loi Krathong

FULL-MOON FESTIVAL

A beautiful festival where, on the night of the full moon, small lotus-shaped boats made of banana leaf and containing a lit candle are set adrift on Mae Nam Chao Phraya. Held in early November.

Fat Festival

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Sponsored by FAT 104.5FM radio, Bangkok's indie-est indie bands gather for an annual fest. Held in early November.

Bangkok Pride

GAY & LESBIAN

(www.bangkokpride.org) A week-long festival of parades, parties and awards is organised by the city's gay businesses and organisations. Held in mid-November.

Bangkok World Film Festival

FILM FESTIVAL

(www.worldfilmbkk.com) Home-grown talent and overseas Indies arrive on the silver screens. Held in mid-November.

December**King's Birthday**

FESTIVAL

Locals celebrate their monarch's birthday with lots of parades and fireworks. Held on 5 December.

🛏 Sleeping

At first glance, deciding where to lay your head in Bangkok appears an insurmountable task – there are countless hotels in virtually every corner of this sprawling city. Making this task slightly easier is the fact that where you stay is largely determined by your budget. Banglamphu and the tourist ghetto of Th Khao San still hold the bulk of Bangkok's budget accommodation, although the downside is that it can be difficult to get to other parts of town. Cheap rooms are also available around lower Th Sukhumvit, although you'll have to put up with sex tourists and touts. Chinatown also has its share of hotels in this category, with the added bonus of anonymity. And there's a decent selection of budget digs on Soi Ngam Duphli, near Th Sathon.

Those willing to spend a bit more can consider staying in 'downtown' Bangkok. Both Th Sukhumvit and Th Silom have heaps of midrange options, often within walking distance of the BTS or MRT. The sois opposite the National Stadium, near Siam Sq, have some good midrange options, and have the benefit of being close to the BTS.

Upper Sukhumvit is home to many of Bangkok's boutique and upscale designer hotels. And the city's most famous luxury hotels are largely found along the riverside near Th Silom.

KO RATANAKOSIN, BANGLAMPHU & THONBURI

Ko Ratanakosin, the most toured area of Bangkok, was until relatively recently utterly devoid of lodging options. But with the advent of the boutique-hotel craze, a few riverside shophouses are being transformed into charming tourists' nests.

Although Banglamphu is ground zero for budget accommodation in Bangkok, this doesn't necessarily mean it's the only or even the best place to stay in town, but prices are generally low, and services such as internet cafes, travel agents and beer stalls are available in abundance, making it a convenient base.

In recent years many longstanding Banglamphu guest house owners have converted their former hovels into small hotels, leading to an abundance of new, good-value midrangers and posh backpacker hostels. Although some see this as the gentrification of Th Khao San, it's added a dimension of accommodation that was previously lacking.

It would be impossible to list all of Banglamphu's accommodation options in this book. Instead, we've chosen a select few that stand out, typically those away from the main strip, which can get pretty noisy. If you've got the time, explore a bit and check out a few guest houses before making a decision – there are increasingly attractive options spanning all price levels on outlying streets such as riverside Th Phra Athit, leafy Soi Ram Buttri and the residential side streets off Th Samsen. During the high season (December to February), however, it's probably a wise idea to take the first vacant bed you come across. The best time of day to find a vacancy is around check-out time, 10am or 11am.

Th Khao San & Around**Diamond House**

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$

(Map p60; ☎0 2629 4008; www.thaidiamondhouse.com; 4 Th Samsen; r 2000-2800B, ste 3600B; 📍📞📧; bus 32, 516, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Despite sharing real estate with a rather brash Chinese temple, there's no conflict of design at this eccentric, funky hotel. Most rooms are loft style, with beds on raised platforms, and are outfitted with stained glass, dark, lush colours and chic furnishings. There's a lack of windows, and some of the suites aren't that much larger than the cheaper rooms, but a rooftop sunbathing deck and an outdoor Jacuzzi (!) make up for this.

NapPark Hostel

HOSTEL \$

(Map p60; ☎0 2282 2324; www.nappark.com; 8 Th Tani; dm 550-750B; 📍📞📧; river ferry Tha Phra Athit) This exceedingly well-done hostel features dorm rooms of various sizes, the smallest and most expensive of which boasts six pod-like beds outfitted with power points, mini-TV, reading lamp, and wi-fi. Daily

PRICE RANGES IN BANGKOK

Hotel rooms are generally more expensive in Bangkok than elsewhere in Thailand, but don't fret as there's a huge variety and significant discounts can be had, making accommodation very good value overall. In this chapter, we have divided rooms into the following three categories:

- » **Budget** less than 1000B
- » **Midrange** 1000B to 3000B
- » **Top End** more than 3000B

The prices listed are high-season walk-in rates, but it's worth noting that significant discounts can be found by booking online. See the boxed text, p114 for recommended sites.

So what do you get for your money? At the **budget** end, the days of 50B beds in Banglamphu are over, but those counting every baht can still get a fan-cooled dorm bed (or a closet-like room) for between 150B and 200B with a shared bathroom. The more you're willing to pay, the more likely you are to get a towel, hot water and air-con. If you require privacy and your own bathroom, paying in the realm of 700B or so can get you a capable, although generally characterless, room.

The biggest mixed bag of all, the **midrange** level starts out with the high-quality guest houses, then moves into a grey area of ordinariness. Above 1000B, the hotels have all the appearance of a hotel back home – a bellboy, uniformed desk clerks and a well-polished lobby – but without the predictability. If you're on a lower midrange budget, and aren't so keen on aesthetics, some very acceptable rooms can be had for between around 1500B and 2000B. If your budget is near the higher end of the scale, it really pays to book ahead, as online discounts here can be substantial.

Bangkok's growing array of **top-end** hotels typically include amenities such as pool, spa, fitness and business centres and overpriced internet connections. The famous brands generally provide more space, while 'boutique' hotels emphasise ambience. In the top tier, rooms start at more than 10,000B, but in most of the luxurious design and boutique hotels, and the vast majority of the international brands, you're looking at about 6000B to 9000B, before hefty online discounting. Keep in mind that the hotels in this category will generally add a 10% service charge plus 7% tax to hotel bills.

cultural-based activities including bike trips and volunteer opportunities, and inviting communal areas ensure that you may not actually get the chance to plug in.

Buddy Boutique Hotel BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$
(Map p60; ☎ 0 2629 4477; www.buddylodge.com; 256 Th Khao San; r incl breakfast 3500-4500B; 📍@📍; bus 2, 15, 44, 511, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) This gigantic complex, which includes a pool, fitness room and, ahem, a branch of McDonald's, is, as far as we're aware, the most expensive place to stay on Th Khao San. Correspondingly, rooms are comfortable, well equipped and evocative of a breezy tropical manor house.

Villa Cha-Cha HOTEL \$\$
(Map p60; ☎ 0 2280 1025; www.villachacha.com; 36 Th Tani; r 900-2900B; 📍@📍; bus 53, 516, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Wind between statues, lounging residents, an expansive restaurant

and an inviting pool to emerge at this seemingly hidden, but popular hotel. A few clumsy stabs have been made at interior design (think topless portraits), but the real draw is the social, resort-like atmosphere.

Rikka Inn BUDGET HOTEL \$\$
(Map p60; ☎ 0 2282 7511; www.rikkainn.com; 259 Th Khao San; r 1150-1450B; 📍@📍; bus 53, 516, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Boasting tight but attractive rooms, a rooftop pool and a central location, the new Rikka is one of several great-value hotels changing the face of Th Khao San.

Lamphu House BUDGET HOTEL \$
(Map p60; ☎ 0 2629 5861; www.lamphouse.com; 75-77 Soi Ram Buttri; r 400-980B; 📍@📍; river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Tucked off Soi Ram Buttri, you'll forget how close to Th Khao San you are in this quiet, homey budget hotel.

Rooms are simple but clean, with the cheapes cooled by fan and sharing bathrooms.

Vientai Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p60; ☎ 2280 5434; www.vientai.co.th; 42 Th Rambuttri; r 2200-4000B, ste 5200B; 📍📞📺; bus 53, 516, ferry Tha Phra Athit) Long before Th Khao San was 'discovered', this was an ordinary Chinese-style hotel in a quiet neighbourhood. It now sits comfortably in the midrange with reliable but unstylish rooms. Prices include breakfast.

Outside the Th Khao San Area



Lamphu Tree House

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p60; ☎ 2282 0991; www.lamphutreehotel.com; 155 Wanchat Bridge, Th Prachatiptai; r incl breakfast 1500-2100B; 📍📞📺; bus 56, 58, 516, klong taxi Tha Phah Fah, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Despite the name, this attractive mid-ranger has its feet firmly on land and as such, represents brilliant value. Rooms are attractive and inviting, and the rooftop bar, pool, internet, restaurant and quiet canal-side location ensure that you may never feel the need to leave. A new annexe a couple of blocks away increases your odds of snagging an elusive reservation.

Arun Residence

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p60; ☎ 2221 9158; www.arunresidence.com; 36-38 Soi Pratu Nok Yung, Th Maha Rat; r 3500-3800B, ste 5500B; 📍📞📺; bus 123, 508, river ferry Tha Tien) Although strategically located across from Wat Arun, this multilevel wooden house on the river boasts much more than just brilliant views. The six rooms here manage to feel both homey and stylish, some being tall and loftlike, while others cojoin two rooms (the best is the top-floor suite with its own balcony). There are inviting communal areas, including a library, a rooftop bar and a restaurant. Breakfast is included.

Praya Palazzo

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p60; ☎ 2883 2998; www.prayapalazzo.com; 757/1 Somdej Prapinklao Soi 2, Thonburi; r 6000-11,900B, ste 16,500-26,500B; 📍📞📺; hotel shuttle from Tha Phra Athit) After lying dormant for nearly 30 years, this elegant 19th-century mansion has been reborn as an attractive riverside boutique hotel. The 17 rooms can feel rather tight, and river views can be elusive, but the meticulous renovation, handsome antique furnishings and bucolic atmosphere convene in a hotel with genuine old-word charm. Prices include breakfast.

Chakrabongse Villas

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p60; ☎ 2622 3356; www.thaivillas.com; 396/1 Th Maha Rat; r 5000B, ste 10,000-40,00B; 📍📞📺; river ferry Tha Tien) The occasionally inhabited compound of Thai royalty dating back to 1908, this unique hotel incorporates three sumptuous but cramped rooms and six larger suites and villas. There's a pool, jungle-like gardens and an elevated deck for romantic riverside dining. Breakfast is included.

Fortville Guesthouse

BUDGET HOTEL \$

(Map p60; ☎ 2282 3932; www.fortvilleguesthouse.com; 9 Th Phra Sumen; r 650-970B; bus 32, 33, 64, 82; 📍📞📺, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) With an exterior that combines elements of a modern church and/or castle, and an interior that relies on mirrors and industrial elements, the design concept of this unique new hotel is a bit hard to pin down. Rooms are stylishly minimal, and the more expensive ones include perks such as fridge, balcony and free wi-fi.

Navalai River Resort

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p60; ☎ 2280 9955; www.navalai.com; 45/1 Th Phra Athit; r incl breakfast 2900-4800B; bus 32, 33, 64, 82; 📍📞📺, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) The latest thing to go up on breezy Th Phra Athit, this chic hotel has 74 modern rooms, many looking out over the Chao Phraya River. There are attractive Thai design touches throughout, but you might end up spending much of your time checking out the views from the rooftop pool.

Old Bangkok Inn

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p60; ☎ 2629 1787; www.oldbangkokinn.com; 609 Th Phra Sumen; r incl breakfast 3190-6590B; klong taxi to Tha Phan Fah; 📍📞📺) The 10 rooms in this refurbished antique shop-house are decadent and sumptuous, combining rich colours and heavy wood furnishings. All have computers for personal use, and some have semi-outdoor bathrooms. The perfect honeymoon hotel.

Baan Sabai

BUDGET HOTEL \$

(Map p60; ☎ 2629 1599; baansabai@hotmail.com; 12 Soi Rongmai; s 190, r 270-600B; 📍📞; bus 53, 516, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Truly living up to its name (Comfortable House), this rambling old building holds dozens of plain but comfy rooms, at a variety of prices. There's a palpable old-school atmosphere, particularly at the inviting open-air restaurant-bar area downstairs.

New Siam Riverside

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p60; ☑ 0 2629 3535; www.newsiam.net; 21 Th Phra Athit; r incl breakfast 1390-2990B; 🍷🍷🍷; bus 32, 33, 64, 82, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) One of a couple of new places along Th Phra Athit taking advantage of the riverside setting, this hotel has comfortable rooms with tiny bathrooms. But the real value is the amenities (internet, travel agent, restaurant) and the location on one of the city's more pleasant streets.

Aurum: The River Place

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p60; ☑ 0 2622 2248; www.aurum-bangkok.com; 394/27-29 Soi Pansook, Th Maha Rat; r incl breakfast 3950-4900B; 🍷🍷🍷; bus 123, 508, river ferry Tha Tien) The 12 modern rooms here don't necessarily reflect the grand European exterior of this refurbished shophouse. Nonetheless they're comfortable and well appointed, and most offer fleeting views of the Chao Phraya.

Baan Chantra

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$

(Map p60; ☑ 0 2628 6988; www.baanchantra.com; 120 Th Samsen; r incl breakfast 2400-3500B; 🍷🍷🍷; bus 32, 516, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) This beautiful converted house is without pretensions, preferring to be comfortable and roomy rather than fashionable and pinched. Many of the house's original teak details remain, and the deluxe room boasts a sunny patio.

Wild Orchid Villa

BUDGET HOTEL \$

(Map p60; ☑ 0 2629 4378; www.wildorchidvilla.com; 8 Soi Chana Songkhram; r 280-1800B; 🍷🍷🍷; bus 32, 33, 64, 82, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) The cheapies here are some of the tiniest we've seen anywhere, but all rooms are clean and neat, and come in a bright, friendly package. This place is exceedingly popular, so it's best to book ahead.

Penpark Place

BUDGET HOTEL \$-\$

(Map p60; ☑ 0 2628 8896; www.penparkplace.com; 22 Soi 3, Th Samsen; r 300-1350B, ste 1800B; 🍷🍷🍷; bus 53, 516, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) This former factory has been turned into a good-value budget hotel. Rooms in the original building are little more than a bed and a fan, but a recent add-on sees a handful of well-equipped apartment-like rooms and suites.

Some other budget and midrange options:

Hotel Dé Moc

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p60; ☑ 0 2282 2831; www.hoteldemoc.com; 78 Th Prachathipatai; r incl breakfast 1960-2520B; 🍷🍷🍷; bus 12, 56) The rooms at this

classic hotel are large, with high ceilings and generous windows, but the furnishings could certainly use an update. Complimentary transport to Th Khao San and free bike rental are thoughtful perks.

Sam Sen Sam

GUEST HOUSE \$

(Map p60; ☑ 0 2628 7067; www.samsensam.com; 48 Soi 3, Th Samsen; r 590-2400B; river ferry to Tha Phra Athit; 🍷🍷🍷) One of the homiest places around, this bright, refurbished villa gets good reports about its friendly service and quiet location.

Rajata Hotel

BUDGET HOTEL \$

(Map p60; ☑ 0 2628 8084; www.rajatahotel.com; 46 Soi 6, Th Samsen; r 650-850B; 🍷🍷🍷; bus 53, 516, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) This old-skool hotel is a plain but comfortable choice for those who don't want to stay on Th Khao San, but who don't want to be too far away.

New Merry V Guest House

BUDGET HOTEL \$

(Map p60; ☑ 0 2280 3315; newmerry@gmail.com; 18-20 Th Phra Athit; s 150, r 290-700B; 🍷🍷; bus 32, 33, 64, 82, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) The cheap rooms here are as bare as it gets, but are spotless and have ample natural light and the odd view or two.

CHINATOWN & PHAHURAT

Yaowarat, Bangkok's Chinatown, isn't the most hospitable part of town, but for those who wish to stay off the beaten track it's an area where travellers can remain largely anonymous. There's a decent selection of accommodation, much of it just off busy streets, so be sure to assess the noise situation before choosing your room. The area used to be a nightmare to get to, but the MRT stop at Hua Lamphong has improved things immensely.

If you're arriving in Bangkok by train and can't be bothered to search elsewhere for accommodation, there are several great budget choices near Hua Lamphong train station, including the **Baan Hualampong** (p109), **Siam Classic** (Map p76; ☑ 0 2639 6363; www.siamclassic-hostel.com; 336/10 Trok Chalong Krung; r 450-1400B; 🍷🍷🍷; MRT Hua Lamphong, river ferry Tha Ratchawong) and **@Hua Lamphong** (Map p76; ☑ 0 2639 1925; www.at-hualamphong.com; 326/1 Th Phra Ram IV; dm 200B, r 690-1000B; 🍷🍷🍷; MRT Hua Lamphong, river ferry Tha Ratchawong).

Shanghai Mansion

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p76; ☑ 0 2221 2121; www.shanghai-inn.com; 479-481 Th Yaowarat; r 2500-3500B, ste 4000B;

BANGKOK'S GRANDE DAME

The Oriental Hotel started out as a roughshod boarding house for European seafarers in the late 19th century, but was transformed into an aristocratic magnet by Hans Niels Anderson, the founder of the formidable East Asiatic Company (which operated between Bangkok and Copenhagen). He hired an Italian designer to build what is now known as the Authors' Wing, which was the city's most elaborate secular building; all other grand architecture at the time was commissioned by the king.

With a dramatic setting beside Mae Nam Chao Phraya, the hotel has gained its reputation from its famous guests. A Polish-born sailor named Joseph Conrad stayed here in between nautical jobs in 1888. W Somerset Maugham stumbled into the hotel with an advanced case of malaria contracted during his overland journey from Burma. In his feverish state, he heard the German manager arguing with the doctor about how a death in the hotel would hurt business. Maugham's recovery and completion of *Gentleman in the Parlour: A Record of a Journey from Rangoon to Haiphong* contributed to the long-lasting literary appeal of the hotel. Other notable guests have included Noël Coward, Graham Greene, John le Carré, James Michener, Gore Vidal and Barbara Cartland. Some modern-day writers even claim that a stay in the Oriental will overcome a writer's block.

To soak up the ambience of old seafaring Bangkok, stop by for a cocktail at the Bamboo Bar or toast the 'swift river' as Noël Coward did from the riverside terrace. For teetotalers, an afternoon brew is served in a frilly Victorian lounge filled with black-and-white photographs of Rama V. To ensure its aristocratic leanings in a less formal age, the hotel enforces a dress code (no shorts, sleeveless shirts or sandals allowed).

☎️🚢; river ferry Tha Ratchawong) Easily the most consciously stylish place to stay in Chinatown, if not in all of Bangkok. This award-winning boutique hotel screams Shanghai circa 1935 with stained glass, an abundance of lamps, bold colours and tongue-in-cheek Chinatown kitsch. If you're willing to splurge, ask for one of the bigger streetside rooms with tall windows that allow more natural light.

Baan Hualampong GUEST HOUSE \$
(Map p76; ☎️ 0 2639 8054; www.baanhualampong.com; 336/20-21 Trok Chalong Krung; dm 250B, r 290-800B; ☎️🚢; MRT Hua Lamphong) Repeat visitors rave about the homey setting and warm, personal service at this guest house. Located a short walk from Hua Lamphong train station, it has kitchen and laundry facilities, and there are lots of chill-out areas and computers. Prices include breakfast.

China Town Hotel HOTEL \$\$
(Map p76; ☎️ 0 2225 0204; www.chinatownhotel.co.th; 526 Th Yaowarat; r 880-2500B; ☎️🚢; MRT Hua Lamphong, river ferry Tha Ratchawong) Popular with Chinese tourists, the lobby here plays on the theme suggested by the hotel's name, but the rooms are largely devoid of any design concept. Nonetheless, they've recently been remodelled and offer decent value.

RIVERSIDE

Accommodation on either side of the Mae Nam Chao Phraya tends to diverge between upscale and hostel, with little in between.

Oriental Hotel LUXURY HOTEL \$\$\$
(Map p80; ☎️ 0 2659 9000; www.mandarinoriental.com; 48 Soi 40/Oriental, Th Charoen Krung; r 12,799-14,799B, ste 23,999-140,999B; ☎️🚢🚢; hotel shuttle boat from Tha Sathon/Central Pier) For the true Bangkok experience, a stay at this grand old riverside hotel is a must. The majority of rooms are located in the modern and recently refurbished New Wing, but we prefer the old-world ambience of the Garden and Authors' Wings. The hotel is also home to the city's most longstanding fine dining restaurant, Le Normandie (p121), and across the river in Thonburi one of the region's most acclaimed spas (p94) and a cooking school. Breakfast is included. For background on the hotel's history, see the boxed text, above.

Shangri-La Hotel LUXURY HOTEL \$\$\$
(Map p80; ☎️ 0 2236 7777; www.shangri-la.com; 89 Soi 42/1/Wat Suan Phlu, Th Charoen Krung; r 6800-7700B, ste 8500-15,600B; ☎️🚢🚢; BTS Saphan Taksin) A recent facelift has the longstanding Shangri-La looking better than ever. Generous rates, breakfast included, a resort-like atmosphere and ample activities and amenities make this a good choice for families.

Swan Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p80; ☎ 2235 9271; www.swanhotelbkk.com; 31 Soi 36, Th Charoen Krung; s/d incl breakfast 1200/1500B; 🏠🚶🚶🚶; river ferry Tha Oriental) Despite its relatively large size, this classic Bangkok hotel is able to maintain a homey feel. Recent renovations has it looking better than ever, although the room furnishings are still stuck in the 1970s. The inviting pool area is a bit more timeless, and the entire place is virtually spotless.

Peninsula Hotel

LUXURY HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p80; ☎ 2861 2888; www.peninsula.com; off Th Charoen Nakhon, Thonburi; r 10,800-15,500B, ste 18,800-120,000B; hotel shuttle boat from Tha Sathon/Central Pier; 🏠🚶🚶🚶) After more than a decade in Bangkok, the Pen still seems to have it all: the location (towering over the river in Thonburi), the rep (it's consistently one of the highest-ranking luxury hotels in the world) and one of the highest levels of service in town. If money is no obstacle, stay on one of the upper floors (there are 38) where you literally have all of Bangkok at your feet. Prices include breakfast.

Millennium Hilton

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p80; ☎ 2442 2000; www.bangkok.hilton.com; off Th Charoen Nakhorn, Thonburi; r 6200-7800B, ste 10,000B; 🏠🚶🚶🚶; hotel shuttle boat from River City & Tha Sathon/Central Pier) As soon as you enter the dramatic lobby, it's obvious that this is Bangkok's youngest, most modern riverside hotel. Rooms, all of which boast widescreen river views, follow this theme and are decked out with funky furniture and Thai-themed photos. A glass elevator and an artificial beach are just some of the fun touches.

River View Guest House

BUDGET HOTEL \$

(Map p80; ☎ 2234 5429; www.riverviewbkk.com; 768 Soi Phanurangsi, Th Songwat; r 350-1500B; 🏠🚶; river ferry Marine Department) After 20 years, this towering budget staple is finally receiving a much-needed renovation. The rooms that have been renovated are spacious and modern, although the halls and exterior are caught in a rather gritty time warp. To get there, heading north on Th Charoen Krung from Th Si Phraya, take a left onto Th Songwat (before the Chinatown Arch), then the second left onto Soi Phanurangsi. You'll start to see signs at this point.

New Road Guesthouse

HOSTEL \$

(Map p80; ☎ 2630 9371; www.newroadguesthouse.com; 1216/1 Th Charoen Krung; dm fan/air-

con 160/250B, r 900-2500B; 🏠🚶🚶; river ferry Tha Si Phraya) For those on tight budgets, the clean dorms with fan are among the cheapest accommodation in all of Bangkok. The attached travel agency, visit beyond (see p146), is reputable.

P&R Residence

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$

(Map p80; ☎ 2639 6091-93; pandrresidence@gmail.com; 34 Soi 30, Th Charoen Krung; r 900-1800B; 🏠🚶; river ferry Tha Si Phraya) There's nothing fancy about the P&R, but its rooms are comfortable and clean and it's very fairly priced for this atmospheric corner of town.

SILOM & SATHON

The city's financial district along Th Silom is not the most charming area of town, but it is convenient to nightspots and to the BTS and MRT for quick access to modern parts of Bangkok. There's a lack of budget accommodation around Th Silom, but some good-value boutique midrangers can be found on Th Sala Daeng. Some of Bangkok's most famous top-enders are also located along this stretch of the river and can be reached via the complimentary hotel ferries at Tha Sathon (Central Pier).

Th Sathon is home to several top-end hotels, but lacks atmosphere, the primary feature being the vast eponymous road. If you need to stay around this area also check out p115 for a few more hotel options around lower Th Sathon.

TOP CHOICE Siam Heritage

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p82; ☎ 2353 6101; www.thesiamheritage.com; 115/1 Th Surawong; r 3000-3500B, ste 4500-9000B; 🏠🚶🚶🚶; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) Tucked off busy Th Surawong, this classy boutique hotel oozes with homey Thai charm – probably because the owners also live in the same building. The rooms are decked out in silk and dark woods with genuinely thoughtful design touches, not to mention thoughtful amenities. There's an inviting rooftop garden/pool/spa, which like the rest of the hotel, are cared for by a team of charming and professional staff. Breakfast is included. Highly recommended.

Heritage Baan Silom

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$

(Map p82; ☎ 2236 8388; www.theheritagehotels.com; Baan Silom Shopping Centre, 669 Soi 19, Th Silom; r 2100-3400B; 🏠🚶🚶; BTS Surasak) Tucked behind a 'lifestyle arcade' (ie shopping centre), this wannabe top-ender is a modern interpretation of an English colonial-era

mansion. Carefully designed with attractive wood and wicker furnishings, the rooms are bright and airy, each featuring a different colour theme and custom wall prints.

La Résidence Hotel BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$
(Map p82; ☑ 0 2233 3301; www.laresidencebangkok.com; 173/8-9 Th Surawong; r 1200-2200B, ste 3200-3700B; 📶📶📶; BTS Chong Nonsi) La Résidence is a boutique inn with playfully and individually decorated rooms. A standard room is very small and fittingly decorated like a child's bedroom. The next size up is more mature and voluptuous with blood-red walls and modern Thai motifs. Breakfast is included.

Baan Saladaeng BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$
(Map p82; ☑ 0 2636 3038; www.baansaladaeng.com; 69/2 Soi Sala Daeng 2; r incl breakfast 1300-2300B; 📶📶; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) Of the handful of pint-sized boutique hotels along Th Sala Daeng, Baan Saladaeng is most welcoming. The lobby's cheery primary colour theme carries on into the 11 rooms, those on the upper floors being the largest and airiest.

Triple Two Silom HOTEL \$\$\$
(Map p82; ☑ 0 2627 2222; www.tripletwosilom.com; 222 Th Silom; r 3500-3800B, ste 5500B; 📶📶📶; BTS Chong Nonsi) Rooms here resemble sleek modern offices - in a good way. But don't worry, with huge bathrooms and inviting-looking beds, you'll be inspired to relax, not work. Guests can use the rooftop garden, but have to go next door to the sister Narai Hotel for the swimming pool and fitness centre. Prices include breakfast.

Dusit Thani LUXURY HOTEL \$\$\$
(Map p82; ☑ 0 2200 9000; www.dusit.com; 946 Th Phra Ram IV; r 7900-10,000B, ste 12,500-32,500B; 📶📶📶; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) At one point the tallest building in the country, this venerable luxury hotel is a testament to how much things have changed in Bangkok. A 2010 renovation has many of the rooms looking more modern than the flagrantly 1970s exterior, but the hotel remains notable more for its convenient location and city views than its hip factor. Breakfast is included.

Rose Hotel HOTEL \$\$\$
(Map p82; ☑ 0 2266 8268-72; www.rosehotelbkk.com; 118 Th Surawong; r 3200-3400B, ste 4000-4400B; 📶📶📶; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) Don't let the unremarkable exterior fool you - the convenient location, modern

rooms, pool, gym and sauna make this Vietnam War-era vet a pretty solid deal. Prices include breakfast.

HQ Hostel HOSTEL \$
(Map p82; ☑ 0 2233 1598; www.hqhostel.com; 5/3-4 Soi 3, Th Silom; dm 380-599B, r 1300-1700B; 📶📶📶; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) This new hostel combines basic but stylish rooms and dorms with inviting communal areas, smack dab in the middle of Bangkok's financial district.

Bangkok Christian Guest House BUDGET HOTEL \$\$
(Map p82; ☑ 0 2233 2206; www.bcgh.org; 123 Soi Sala Daeng 2; s/d/tr incl breakfast 1100/1540/1980B; 📶📶📶; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) This austere guest house is a great choice for families, as some rooms have as many as five beds and there's a 2nd-floor children's play area.

YHA Downtown Bangkok HOSTEL \$
(Map p82; ☑ 0 2266 4443; 395/4 Th Silom; dm 299B, r 699-1129B; 📶📶; BTS Chong Nonsi) Another tidy and conveniently located backpacker hostel.

SIAM SQUARE & PRATUNAM

For centrally located accommodation, there's really no better destination than the area surrounding Siam Square. Home to the intersection of the two BTS lines, and only a brief-ish (depending on traffic) taxi ride to Banglamphu, this is about as good as it gets in ever-expanding Bangkok.

For those on a budget who also need a central location, a low-key backpacker community exists along Soi Kasem San 1 (say 'gà-sáirm'), across from the National Stadium.

TOP CHOICE Siam@Siam HOTEL \$\$\$
(Map p86; ☑ 0 2217 3000; www.siamatsiam.com; 865 Th Phra Ram I; r incl breakfast 5000-700B; 📶📶📶; BTS National Stadium) The lobby of this new hotel is more amusement park than accommodation, but that's what makes it so much fun. A seemingly random mish-mash of colours and materials result in a style one could only describe as 'junkyard' - but in a good way, of course. The rooms, which continue the theme, and which are located between the 14th and 24th floors, offer terrific city views, free wi-fi and breakfast. There's also a spa, a rooftop restaurant and a pool on the 11th floor.

Lub*d

HOSTEL \$

(Map p86; ☎ 0 2634 7999; www.lubd.com; Th Pha Ram I; dm 550B, r 1350-1800B; 📶📶📶; BTS National Stadium) The title is a play on the Thai *lâp dee*, meaning 'sleep well', but the fun atmosphere at this bright new backpacker hostel might make you want to stay up all night. There are 24 dorms (including women-only dorms), each with only four beds, and a few private rooms, both with and without bathrooms. There's an inviting communal area stocked with free internet, games and a bar, and thoughtful facilities ranging from washing machines to a theatre room. If this one's full, there's another **branch** (Map p82; ☎ 0 2634 7999; www.lubd.com; 4 Th Decho; dm 400B, r 1050-1400B; 📶📶📶; BTS Chong Nonsi) just off Th Silom.

Swissôtel Nai Lert Park

LUXURY HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p86; ☎ 0 2253 0123; www.swissotel.com/bangkok-nailetpark; 2 Th Witthayu/Wireless Rd; r 4100-4500B, ste 5200-6800B; 📶📶📶; BTS Phloen Chit, klong taxi Tha Witthayu) This hotel has seen a few reincarnations during its 30-year history, but we like the current one. The suites follow the sleek design theme laid out in the lobby, while cheaper rooms follow a more conservative wood-heavy 'classic' theme. Regardless, all are huge and include balconies. Breakfast is included.

Conrad Hotel Bangkok

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p86; ☎ 0 2690 9999; www.conradhotels.com; 87 Th Witthayu/Wireless Rd; r 7298-10,005B, ste 14,242-17,185B; 📶📶📶; BTS Phloen Chit) When built in 2003, the Conrad was one of the first hotels in Bangkok to consciously make an effort to appeal to the young and hip. It has since been surpassed in this area, but still offers attractive and comfortable accommodation. Breakfast is included.

Reno Hotel

BUDGET HOTEL \$\$

(Map p86; ☎ 0 2215 0026; www.renhotel.co.th; 40 Soi Kasem San 1; r incl breakfast 1280-1890B; BTS National Stadium, klong taxi to Tha Ratchathewi; 📶📶📶) Most of the rooms reflect the renovations evident in the lobby and exterior, but the cafe and classic pool of this Vietnam War-era hotel still cling to the past.

Vie

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p86; ☎ 0 2309 3939; www.viehotelbangkok.com; 117/39-40 Th Phayathai; r/ste incl breakfast 4296/5030-12,530B; BTS Ratchathewi; 📶📶📶) Vie combines a convenient location and a casual atmosphere in one attractive package. The service gets good reports, there's

an emphasis on wining and dining, and if you're considering upgrading, the duplex suites are spacious and offer great city views.

Asia Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p86; ☎ 0 2217 0808; www.asiahotel.co.th; 296 Th Phayathai; r 3700-4800B, ste 8000-10,000B; 📶📶📶; BTS Ratchathewi, klong taxi to Tha Ratchathewi) A recent renovation has this tourist-group staple looking slightly more modern than the 1970s-era lobby would suggest. Connoisseurs of kitsch don't fret: the hotel's Calypso Cabaret (see the boxed text, p133) and a nightly Elvis show are still in full effect. Breakfast is included.

Golden House

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p86; ☎ 0 2252 9535; www.goldenhouses.net; 1025/5-9 Th Phloenchit; r incl breakfast 2000-2300B; 📶📶📶; BTS Chit Lom) With parquet flooring and built-in wooden furniture, the 27 rooms here are more like modern Thai condos than hotel rooms. The beds are huge, but just like those of Thai condos, they have the potential to sag.

Novotel Bangkok on**Siam Square**

BUSINESS HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p86; ☎ 0 2255 6888; www.novotelbkk.com; Soi 6, Siam Sq; r 4049-6403B, ste 5449-11,403B; 📶📶📶; BTS Siam) Appropriate for business or leisure, the soon-to-be-renovated Novotel Siam is conveniently located near the BTS and shopping. Breakfast is included.

A-One Inn

BUDGET HOTEL \$

(Map p86; ☎ 0 2215 3029; www.aoneinn.com; 25/13-15 Soi Kasem San 1; s/d/tr 600/750/950B; 📶📶📶; BTS National Stadium, klong taxi to Tha Ratchathewi) The rooms here are tight and simple, but the wealth of backpacker amenities (computers, luggage storage, free ice and water) makes up for this.

Wendy House

BUDGET HOTEL \$\$

(Map p86; ☎ 0 2214 1149; www.wendyguesthouse.com; 36/2 Soi Kasem San 1; r incl breakfast 900-1200B; 📶📶📶; BTS National Stadium, klong taxi to Tha Ratchathewi) The rooms here are small and basic, but well stocked (TV, fridge) for this price range.

Bed & Breakfast Inn

BUDGET HOTEL \$

(Map p86; ☎ 0 2215 3004; Soi Kasem San 1; r incl breakfast 500-700B; 📶📶; BTS National Stadium, klong taxi to Tha Ratchathewi) This mazelike guest house has standard but comfortable rooms.

SUKHUMVIT

This seemingly endless urban thoroughfare is Bangkok's unofficial International Zone and also boasts much of the city's accommodation. There's a bit of everything here, from the odd backpacker hostel to sex tourist hovels and five-star luxury. The former two are largely located between Soi 1 and Soi 4, while the latter doesn't begin to appear until you reach Soi 12 or so.

In general, because visitors with larger budgets stay in Sukhumvit, tourist services are more expensive here than in Banglamphu. The trade-off is access to food from virtually every corner of the globe, heaps of nightlife options and easy access to both the BTS and MRT.

Lower Sukhumvit



AriyasomVilla

BED & BREAKFAST \$\$\$

(Map p92; ☎0 2254 880; www.ariyasom.com; 65 Soi 1, Th Sukhumvit; r incl breakfast 4248-9138B; 🏠🚶🚶🚶; BTS Phloen Chit) Located at the end of Soi 1 behind a virtual wall of fragipani, this renovated 1940s-era villa is one of the worst-kept accommodation secrets in Bangkok. If you can score a reservation, you'll be privy to one of 24 spacious rooms, meticulously outfitted with thoughtful Thai design touches and beautiful antique furniture. There's a spa and an inviting tropical pool, and breakfast is vegetarian and served in the original villa's stunning glass-encased dining room.

Suk 11

BUDGET HOTEL \$

(Map p92; ☎0 2253 5927; www.suk11.com; 1/33 Soi 11, Th Sukhumvit; s/d/tr incl breakfast from 535/749/1284B; 🏠🚶🚶; BTS Nana) Extremely well run and equally popular, this guest house is an oasis of woods and greenery in the urban jungle that is Th Sukhumvit. The cheaper rooms have shared bathrooms, and although the owners have somehow managed to stuff nearly 100 rooms in there, you'll still need to book at least two weeks ahead.

Stable Lodge

BUDGET HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p92; ☎0 2653 0017; www.stablelodge.com; 39 Soi 8, Th Sukhumvit; r 1495-1695B; 🏠🚶🚶; BTS Nana) To be honest, we were slightly disappointed that the faux-Tudor theme of the downstairs restaurant didn't carry on into the rooms, but could find no other faults. A recent renovation has given a bit of life to the simple rooms here, and the spacious balconies still offer great city views.

Golden Palace Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p92; ☎0 2252 5115; www.goldenpalacehotel.com; 15 Soi 1, Th Sukhumvit; r 1110-1350B; 🏠🚶🚶; BTS Phloen Chit) The abundance of mirrors in the ground-floor rooms gives this away as a former tryst hotel, but for just a couple of hundred baht more, you can get one of the simple but airy rooms upstairs. A pool, coffeshop and nearby spa ensure that you won't need to go very far to be entertained.

Federal Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p92; ☎0 2253 0175; www.federalbangkok.com; 27 Soi 11, Th Sukhumvit; r incl breakfast 1050-1500B; 🏠🚶🚶; BTS Nana) You wouldn't know it from the exterior, but after 40 years 'Club Fed' finally decided to get a makeover. The upstairs rooms are comfortable and almost contemporary, but the rooms at ground level still scream 1967. The real draws are the frangipani-lined pool and time-warped US-style coffeshop.

Atlanta

BUDGET HOTEL \$

(Map p92; ☎0 2252 1650; 78 Soi 2/Phasak, Th Sukhumvit; r/ste incl breakfast from 535/1820B; 🏠🚶🚶; BTS Phloen Chit) Defiantly antiquated and equally frumpy, this crumbling gem has changed very little since its construction in 1952. The opulent lobby stands in contrast to the simple rooms, but the inviting pool (allegedly the country's first hotel pool) and delightful restaurant are incentive enough.

Swiss Park Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p92; ☎0 2254 0228; 155/23 Soi 11/1, Th Sukhumvit; r/ste from 1500/2900B; 🏠🚶🚶; BTS Nana) The rooms here are workaday and largely forgettable, but the convenient location and friendly and competent staff make this a good midrange find.

Bed Bangkok

HOSTEL \$

(Map p92; ☎0 2655 7604; www.bedbangkok.com; 11/20 Soi 1, Th Sukhumvit; dm/r incl breakfast from 390/800B; 🏠🚶; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) This brand-new hostel manages to maintain a homey feel despite the industrial-design theme. The friendly service makes up for the rather hard dorm beds.

Soi 1 Guesthouse

HOSTEL \$

(Map p92; ☎0 2655 0604; www.soi1guesthouse.com; 220/7 Soi 1, Th Sukhumvit; dm 400B; 🏠🚶; BTS Phloen Chit) This slightly aged backpacker haven has four cluttered dorm rooms and a chummy communal area with pool table, TV and computers.



THINKING AHEAD

The rates listed in this chapter are high-season rack rates; ie the highest price a hotel will generally charge for a room. However, there's no reason you should be paying this much, especially if you know ahead of time when you'll be in town. Booking rooms online can lead to savings of at least 20%, and often more, at many of Bangkok's leading hotels. This can be done directly through the hotel websites or by sites such as **Lonely Planet's Hotels & Hostels** (hotels.lonelyplanet.com), which features thorough reviews from authors and traveller feedback, and a booking facility.

It can also work to your advantage to simply call the hotel and book ahead; sometimes desk staff collect a commission on walk-ins and are reluctant to discount, something that can be remedied by a pre-emptive phone call and an inquiry about the lowest possible rate.

Upper Sukhumvit

Middle Sukhumvit, Soi 19 in particular, is home to a handful of inexpensive yet attractive midrangers, including the surprisingly sophisticated **Sacha's Hotel Uno** (Map p92; ☎ 2651 2180; www.sachas.hotel-uno.com; 28/19 Soi 19, Th Sukhumvit; r incl breakfast 1800-2500B; 📶📶📶; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) and **Silq** (Map p92; ☎ 2252 6800; www.silqbkk.com; 54 Soi 19, Th Sukhumvit; r incl breakfast 2654-3560B; 📶📶📶; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit), and the funky **Fusion Suites** (Map p92; ☎ 2665 2644; www.fusionbangkok.com; 143/61-62 Soi 21/Asoke, Th Sukhumvit; r incl breakfast 2100-2400B, ste incl breakfast 3200B; 📶📶📶; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit).

72 Ekamai

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$

(Map p92; ☎ 02 714 7327; www.72ekamai.com; 72 Soi 63/Ekamai, Th Sukhumvit; r 2100B, ste 2500-2850B; 📶📶📶; BTS Ekkamai) This fun, young-feeling, design-conscious hotel is a great choice. Reds, black and pop art prints define the look here, and perhaps we were mistaken, but on our visit, we swear the place smelled like candy. The junior suites are huge, and like all rooms, are well equipped and conveniently located. Breakfast is included.

Eugenia

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p92; ☎ 0 2259 9017-19; www.theeugenia.com; 267 Soi 31/Sawatdi, Th Sukhumvit; ste incl breakfast 8107-9911B; 📶📶📶; BTS Phrom Phong & access by taxi) Although Thailand was never anybody's colony, there's no doubt about the design influence of this character-laden hotel. Decked out in antique furniture and an abundance of animal skins, a stay here is like travelling to Burma circa 1936. Don't fear though; you won't have to ask the 'boy' to draw you a bath – modern amenities such as flat-screen TVs and free domestic and international calls are also provided (the baths are beautiful and are made of copper). Ask about the vintage-car airport transfers.

Napa Place

BED & BREAKFAST \$\$

(Map p92; ☎ 0 2661 5525; www.napaplace.com; 11/3 Yaek 2, Soi 36, Th Sukhumvit; r 2200-2400B, ste 3400B; 📶📶📶; BTS Thong Lo) Seemingly hidden in the confines of a typical Bangkok urban compound is what must be the city's homiest accommodation. The 12 expansive rooms here have been decorated with dark woods from the family's former business and light brown cloths from the hands of Thai weavers. The communal areas couldn't be much different from the suburban living room you grew up in.

S31

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p92; ☎ 0 2260 1111; www.s31hotel.com; 545 Soi 31, Th Sukhumvit; r 6000B, ste 7000-9000B; 📶📶📶; BTS Phrom Phong) The bold patterns and graphics of its interior and exterior make the S31 a fun, young-feeling choice. Thoughtful touches such as kitchenettes with large fridge, superhuge beds and free courses (cooking, Thai boxing and yoga) prove that the style also has substance. Prices include breakfast. Branches can also be found on Soi 15 and Soi 33.

Ma Du Zi

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p92; ☎ 0 2615 6400; www.maduzihotel.com; cnr Th Ratchadapisek & Soi 16, Th Sukhumvit; r 5000-12,000B, ste 12,000B; 📶📶📶; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) The name is Thai for 'come take a look,' somewhat of a misnomer for this reservations-only, no walk-ins hotel. If you've gained access, behind the gate you'll find an attractive midsize hotel steeped in dark, chic tones and designs. We fancied the immense bathrooms, with a walk-in tub and minimalist shower.

Seven

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p92; ☎ 0 2662 0951; www.sleepatseven.com; 3/15 Soi 31/Sawatdi, Th Sukhumvit; r incl breakfast 3290-5290B; 📍📶🚶; BTS Phrom Phong) This tiny hotel somehow manages to be chic and homey, stylish and comfortable, Thai and international all at the same time. Each of the six rooms is decked out in a different colour that corresponds to Thai astrology, and thoughtful amenities abound.

Davis

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p92; ☎ 0 2260 8000; www.davisbangkok.net; 88 Soi 24, Th Sukhumvit; r 2299-3599B, ste 5999-9999B; 📍📶🚶; BTS Phrom Phong) If it's hard to pinpoint the design of the Davis it's probably because it seems to have covered all the bases with Chinese-, Japanese-, Myanmar- and Balinese-themed rooms. Domestically speaking, there are also 10 Thai-style villas surrounding a pool. Breakfast is included.

Dream Bangkok

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p92; ☎ 0 2254 8500; www.dreambkk.com; 10 Soi 15, Th Sukhumvit; r 3500-4000B, ste 6500-12,000B; 📍📶🚶; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) If your idea of interior design involves stuffed tigers, copious mirrors and slick leather, you'll feel at home here. The standard rooms are a tight fit, but include ample and quirky amenities such as the Dream signature blue light to aid in sleeping. Prices also include breakfast.

Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit

BUSINESS HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p92; ☎ 0 2649 8888; www.luxurycollection.com/bangkok; 250 Th Sukhumvit; r 3500-10,000B, ste 16,500-55,000B; 📍📶🚶; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) This conveniently located business-oriented hotel offers some of the most spacious rooms in town and fills them with a generous array of amenities. By the time you read this, an impending renovation may have already made what was already a very good hotel an excellent hotel. Prices include breakfast.

Baan Sukhumvit

BED & BREAKFAST \$\$

(Map p92; ☎ 0 2258 5622; www.baansukhumvit.com; 392/38-39 Soi 20, Th Sukhumvit; r incl breakfast 1430B; 📍📶🚶; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) One of three similarly priced hotels located on this small side street off Soi 20, Baan Sukhumvit's 12 rooms exude a homey, cosy atmosphere. A newer branch is located around the corner on Soi 18.

Despite the general upscale nature of this part of town, there's a decent selection of backpacker hostels:

Nana Chart Hotel

HOSTEL \$

(Map p92; ☎ 0 2259 6908; www.thailandhostel.com; cnr Soi 25 & Th Sukhumvit; dm 390-550B, r 1200-1800B; 📍📶🚶; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) This tidy, newish backpacker hostel packs 68 plain but more-than-adequate budget rooms, as well as some of the better dorms around with private bathrooms. Prices include breakfast.

Hi-Sukhumvit

HOSTEL \$

(Map p92; ☎ 0 2391 9338; www.hisukhumvit.com; 23 Soi 38, Th Sukhumvit; dm/s/d/tr incl breakfast from 320/650/900/1200B; 📍📶🚶; BTS Thong Lo) Located in a quiet residential street a brief walk from the BTS, this friendly hostel excels with its neat dorms and accompanying immense bathrooms.

LUMPHINI PARK & TH PHRA RAM IV

If you were hitting the Asian hippie trail back in the 1970s, you would have laid your love beads at a guest house in Soi Ngam Duphli, off Th Phra Ram IV, not too far from Lumpini Park. Despite the decades that have passed, it's still a good area to go to for supercheap accommodation, particularly along Soi Si Bamphen. There are also more upmarket options. And getting there has been made even easier by the MRT stop at Lumpini.

**Metropolitan**

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p90; ☎ 0 2625 3333; www.metropolitan.como.bz; 27 Th Sathon Tai, r 4951-5768B, ste 6945-21,186B; 📍📶🚶; MRT Lumpini) The exterior of the former YMCA has changed relatively little, but a peek inside reveals one of Bangkok's sleekest hotels. Urban minimalism rules here, except where it concerns the size of the two-storey penthouse suites. Breakfast (included in the price) is either US-style or 'organic' and the attached nalm (p125) is Bangkok's best upscale Thai restaurant.

LUXX XL

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$

(Off map p90; ☎ 0 2684 1111; www.staywithluxx.com; 82/8 Soi Lang Suan; r 2500-7000B, ste 13,000-22,000B; 📍📶🚶; BTS Ratchadamri) Despite its location in a leafy Bangkok street, Luxx oozes with a minimalist hipness that wouldn't be out of place in London or New York. There's another slightly cheaper **branch** (Map p82; ☎ 0 2635 8800; 6/11 Th Decho; r/ste from 2200/4100B; 📍📶🚶; BTS Chong Nonsi)

on Th Decho, off Th Silom. Breakfast is included at both places.

Sukhothai Hotel HOTEL \$\$\$
(Map p90; ☎0 2344 8888; www.sukhothai.com; 13/3 Th Sathon Tai; r 11,000-14,000B, ste 15,000-90,000B; 📍@📍; MRT Lumpini) As the name suggests, this hotel employs brick stupas, courtyards and antique sculptures to create a historical, temple-like atmosphere. The recently remodelled superior rooms contrast this with hi-tech TVs, phones and yes, toilets. Breakfast is included.

All Seasons Sathorn HOTEL \$\$
(Map p90; ☎0 2343 6333; www.allseasons-sathorn.com; 31 Th Sathon Tai; r incl breakfast 1800-2500B; 📍@📍; MRT Lumpini) The former king's Hotel has been reborn as this modern attractive budget choice, right in the middle of the embassy district. The primary colours and bold lines of the design scheme make up for the lack of natural light in some rooms.

Malaysia Hotel BUDGET HOTEL \$
(Map p90; ☎0 2679 7127; www.malaysiahotelbkk.com; 54 Soi Ngam Duphli; r incl breakfast 698-998B; 📍@📍; MRT Lumpini) The Malaysia was once Bangkok's most famous budget lodge and even provided shelter for Maureen and Tony Wheeler on their maiden shoestring trip through Southeast Asia. Our sources tell us that the couple stay elsewhere when in Bangkok nowadays, but the Malaysia is still a good choice for the rest of us for its fair prices and frozen-in-time atmosphere.

Penguin House BUDGET HOTEL \$
(Map p90; ☎0 2679 9991; www.penguinhouses.com; 27/23 Soi Si Bamphen; r 800-950B; 📍@📍; MRT Lumpini) The oddly named Penguin is a breath of fresh air in this area of tired old-timers. The rear rooms are quieter, and there are a couple of interior rooms that sleep two couples.

ETZzz Hostel BUDGET HOTEL \$
(Map p90; ☎0 2286 9424; www.etzhostel.com; Soi Ngam Duphli; dm/r 200/900B; 📍@📍; MRT Lumpini) The rooms at this brand-new shophouse-based hostel are overpriced, but the tidy dorm, shiny facilities and convenient location are draws.

Ibis Sathon BUDGET HOTEL \$\$
(Map p90; ☎0 2659 2888; 29/9 Soi Ngam Duphli; r incl breakfast 1800B; 📍@📍; MRT Lumpini) The business-friendly Ibis delivers comfort and convenience without corporate expense-account prices.

Café des Arts Guest House BUDGET HOTEL \$
(Map p90; ☎0 2679 8438; 27/39 Soi Si Bamphen; r with fan/air-con 300/400B; 📍; MRT Lumpini) Run by a French-Thai couple, there's seemingly no café (nor art) here, but rather a downstairs noodle restaurant and eight simple rooms upstairs.

GREATER BANGKOK

Many of the following hotels require a little more effort to reach. This also means that they tend to be located in less hectic parts of the city, and are perfect for those who'd rather not stay in the thick of it.

If you need to stay near one of Bangkok's two airports, check the accommodation options in our boxed text, p117.

Phra-Nakorn Norn-Len BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$
(Map p96; ☎0 2628 8188; www.phranakorn-nornlen.com; 46 Soi Thewet 1, Th Krung Kasem; s/d incl breakfast from 1800/2200B; 📍@📍; bus 32, 516, river ferry Tha Thewet) Set in an expansive garden compound decorated like the Bangkok of yesteryear, this bright and cheery hotel is an atmospheric if not necessarily great value place to stay. Rooms are simply furnished, but generously decorated with antiques and wall paintings, and there's wi-fi, massage and endless opportunities for peaceful relaxing. Breakfast originates from the hotel's organic rooftop garden.

Bangkok International Youth Hostel HOSTEL \$
(Map p96; ☎0 2282 0950; 25/15 Th Phitsanulok; dm 200B, r 600-900B; 📍@📍; bus 32, 516, river ferry Tha Thewet) One of the only options if you want to stay in the quiet Dusit area, this recently refurbished hostel has cheaper rooms in the original building and new but cramped rooms in a tall structure facing Th Phitsanulok. There's a pleasant rooftop balcony and a travel library.

Refill Now! HOSTEL \$
(☎0 2713 2044; www.refillnow.co.th; 191 Soi Pridi Bhanom Yong 42, Soi 71, Th Sukhumvit, Phra Khanong; dm/s/d 480/928/1215B; 📍@📍; BTS Phra Khanong & access by taxi) Sporting a look that blends the Habitat catalogue and a Kubrick movie, this is the kind of place that might make you think twice about sleeping in a dorm. The spotless white private rooms and dorms have flirtatious pull screens between each double-bunk; women-only dorms are also available. There's an achingly hip chill-out area, and a massage centre upstairs. If you decide you need to leave, there's

a tük-tük (30B per passenger) to Thong Lo and Phra Khanong BTS stations.

Mystic Place

BOUQUET HOTEL \$\$

(Map p118; ☎ 0 2270 3344; www.mysticplacebkk.com; 224/5-9 Th Pradiphat; r incl breakfast 2250-3250B; ㊚㊚㊚; BTS Saphan Khwai & access by taxi) This hotel unites 36 rooms, each of which is individually and playfully designed. One of the rooms we checked out combined a chair upholstered with stuffed animals and walls covered with graffiti. Heaps of fun and perpetually popular, so be sure to book ahead.

Pullman Bangkok King

Power

BUSINESS HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p97; ☎ 0 2680 9999; www.pullmanbangkokkingpower; 8/2 Th Rang Nam; r/ste incl breakfast 3861-4331/6803-7274B; ㊚㊚㊚; BTS Victory Monument) The Pullman is a great choice for those who want to stay in a business-class hotel, but would rather not stay downtown.

Th Si Ayuthaya, in Thewet, the district north of Banglamphu near the National Library,

is a pleasant backpacker enclave, particularly popular with families and the over-30 crowd. It is a lovely leafy area, but during the rainy season it can be prone to flooding.

Sri Ayuttaya Guest House

BUDGET HOTEL \$

(Map p96; ☎ 0 2282 5942; 23/11 Th Si Ayuthaya, Thewet; r 400-1000B; ㊚㊚㊚; bus 32, 516, river ferry Tha Thewet) The wood-and-brick theme here is a nice break from the usual, less permanent-feeling guest house design. The rooms, half of which share bathrooms, also feel sturdy and inviting.

Shanti Lodge

GUEST HOUSE \$

(Map p96; ☎ 0 2281 2497; 37 Th Si Ayuthaya; dm 250B, r 400-1950B; ㊚㊚㊚; bus 32, 516, river ferry Tha Thewet) This family-run place exudes a peaceful, dharmic aura. Walls are bamboo-thin in the cheaper rooms, but there's a huge variety of accommodation; check out a few rooms before making a decision.

Taewez Guesthouse

BUDGET HOTEL \$

(Map p96; ☎ 0 2280 8856; www.taewez.com; 23/12 Th Si Ayuthaya; r 250-530B; ㊚㊚㊚; bus

LATE-NIGHT TOUCHDOWN

A lot of nail-biting anxiety is expended on international flights arriving in Bangkok around midnight. Will there be taxis into town, will there be available rooms, will my family ever hear from me again? Soothe those nagging voices with the knowledge that most international flights arrive late and that Bangkok is an accommodating place. Yes, there are taxis and even an express train service (see p148).

If you haven't already made hotel reservations, a good area to look for a bed is lower Sukhumvit – it's right off the expressway and hotels around Soi Nana such as the **Swiss Park** (p113) and the **Federal** (p113) are used to lots of late-night traffic and won't break your bank. Alternatively, you could always go to Th Khao San, which stays up late, is full of hotels and guest houses, and sees a near-continuous supply of 'fresh-off-the-birds' just like you.

If, for some reason, you can't stray too far from the airport, these places provide a more than adequate roof.

Suvarnabhumi International Airport

The nearest good budget option is **Refill Now!** (see p116).

» **Grand Inn Come Hotel** (☎ 0 2738 8189-99; www.grandinncome-hotel.com; 99 Moo 6, Th Kingkaew, Bangpli; r incl breakfast from 1800B; ㊚㊚㊚) Solid midranger 10km west of the airport, with airport shuttle and 'lively' karaoke bar.

» **All Seasons Bangkok Huamark** (☎ 0 2308 7888; 5 Soi 15, Th Ramkhamhaeng; r 1366-2195B; ㊚㊚㊚) Less than 20km west of the airport, this midranger has 268 rooms to choose from.

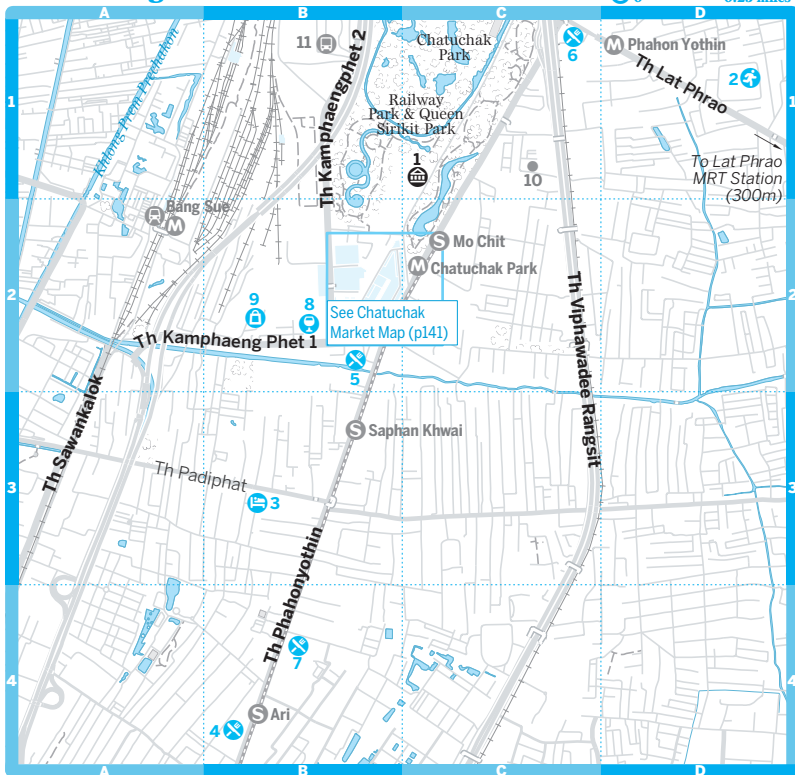
» **Novotel Suvarnabhumi Airport Hotel** (☎ 0 2131 1111; www.novotel.com; r incl breakfast from 7146B; ㊚㊚㊚) Has 600-plus luxurious rooms in the airport compound.

Don Muang Airport

» **Amari Airport Hotel** (☎ 0 2566 1020; www.amari.com; 333 Th Choet Wutthakat; d incl breakfast from 2001-3350B; ㊚㊚㊚) Directly opposite Don Muang (Map p153).

North Bangkok

BANGKOK



32, 516, river ferry Tha Thewet) Popular with French travellers, the cheapest rooms here are plain and share bathrooms, but are good value.

Eating

Invariably the safest of Bangkok's infamous carnal pleasures, food is serious business in this city. Attracting hungry visitors from across the globe, Bangkok's eateries also draw natives from disparate ends of the city, happy to brave traffic or floods for a bowl of noodles or a plate of rice.

The selection is enormous, with eating places in Bangkok ranging from wheeled carts that set up shop on a daily basis to chic dining rooms in five-star hotels. In our experience the tastiest eats are generally found somewhere in-between, at family-run sho-phouse restaurants serving a limited repertoire of dishes.

The influences are also vast, and you'll find everything from Chinese-Thai to Muslim-Thai, not to mention most regional domestic cuisines. And if at some point you do tire of *gǎo-ay dĕe-o* (rice noodles) and curries, Bangkok has an ever-expanding selection of high-quality international restaurants, encompassing everything from upscale French to hole-in-the-wall Japanese ramen houses.

KO RATANAKOSIN, BANGLAMPHU & THONBURI

Despite its proximity to the faux *pât tai* and tame *dôm yam* (a sour/spicy soup) of Th Khao San, Banglamphu is one of the city's most legendary eating areas. Decades-old restaurants and legendary hawkers line the streets in this leafy corner of Old Bangkok, and you could easily spend an entire day grazing the southern end of Th Tanao alone.

Although you'd be wisest to get your domestic nosh away from the main drag, the

North Bangkok

📍 Sights

- 1 Children's Discovery Museum C1

👤 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 2 House of Dhamma D1

🛌 Sleeping

- 3 Mystic Place B3

🍴 Eating

- 4 Baan Suan Pai B4
 5 Or Tor Kor Market B2
 6 Pathè C1
 7 Phat Thai Ari B4

🍷 Drinking

- el Ninyo (see 8)
 8 Fake Club B2

🛍 Shopping

- 9 Talat Rot Fai B2

✈ Transport

- 10 Bangkok Airways C1
 11 Northern & Northeastern Bus Terminal B1

foreign influence on Th Khao San has led to a few import standouts.

In contrast, Bangkok's royal district has an abundance of sights but a dearth of restaurants – a pity, considering the potential views.



Krua Aporn

THAI \$\$

(Map p60; Th Din So; mains 70-320B; ☺lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; ☎; bus 2, 25, 44, 511, klong taxi to Tha Phan Fah) This homey dining room has served members of the Thai royal family and, back in 2006, was recognised as Bangkok's Best Restaurant by the *Bangkok Post*. Must-eat dishes include mussels fried with fresh herbs, the decadent crab fried in yellow chilli oil and the tortilla Española-like crab omelette.

Jay Fai

THAI \$\$

(Map p60; 327 Th Mahachai; mains 200-250B; ☺3pm-2am; klong taxi Tha Phan Fah) You wouldn't think so by looking at her barebones dining room, but Jay Fai is known far and wide for serving Bangkok's most expensive – and arguably most delicious – *pàt kée mow* (drunkard's noodles). The price is justified by the copious fresh seafood, as well as Jay Fai's distinct frying style that results in a virtually oil-free finished product.

Poj Spa Kar

THAI \$\$

(Map p60; 443 Th Tanao; mains 100-200B; ☺lunch & dinner; ☎; bus 2, 25, 44, 511, klong taxi to Tha Phan Fah) Pronounced *pòht sà-pah kahn*, this is allegedly the oldest restaurant in Bangkok, and continues to maintain recipes handed down from a former palace cook. Be sure to order the simple but tasty lemon-

grass omelette or the deliciously sour/sweet *gaang sòm*, a traditional central Thai soup.

Shoshana

ISRAELI \$\$

(Map p60; 88 Th Chakraphong; mains 90-220B; ☺lunch & dinner; ☎; bus 32, 516, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Although prices have gone up slightly since it began back in 1982, Shoshana still puts together a cheap but tasty Israeli meal. Feel safe ordering anything deep-fried – they do an excellent job of it – and don't miss the eggplant dip.

Nang Loeng Market

THAI \$

(off Map p60; Btw Soi 8-10, Th Nakhon Sawan; ☺10am-2pm Mon-Sat; bus 72) Dating back to 1899, this atmospheric market, east of Banglamphu, is primarily associated with Thai sweets, but at lunchtime it's also an excellent place to fill up on savouries. Try a bowl of handmade egg noodles at Rung Ruang or the rich curries at Ratana.

Chote Chitr

THAI \$\$

(Map p60; 146 Th Phraeng Phuthon; mains 30-200B; ☺lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; bus 15, klong taxi to Tha Phan Fah) This third-generation shop-house restaurant boasting just six tables is a Bangkok foodie landmark. The kitchen can be inconsistent, but when they're on, dishes such as *mèe gròrp* (crispy fried noodles) and *yam tóaa ploo* (wing-bean salad) are in a class of their own.

Thip Samai

THAI \$

(Map p60; 313 Th Mahachai; mains 25-120B; ☺5.30pm-1.30am closed alternate Wednesdays; klong taxi Tha Phan Fah) Brace yourself, but you should be aware that the fried noodles sold from carts along Th Khao San have nothing to do with the dish known as *pàt tai*.

DAVID THOMPSON: CHEF & AUTHOR

David Thompson is the Head Chef of both the London and Bangkok branches of the famed *naïm* restaurant. He is also the bestselling author of *Thai Food* and *Thai Street Food*.

HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE THE FOOD IN BANGKOK?

The food of Bangkok is more urbane, with the rough and rambunctious tastes of the wild and remote regions polished off. There's a huge Chinese influence here because Bangkok was a Chinese city. The central-plains food, which Bangkok is the epitome of, is refined and has the classic four flavours [sweet, sour, salty and spicy].

WHAT ARE SOME CLASSIC BANGKOK-STYLE DISHES?

I like some of the dishes in Chinatown, whether it be the oyster place I adore (Nay Mong; p123), or whether it be noodles with fish dumplings or with roast duck. Also *boō pāt pōng gārēe* [crab fried with curry powder], when done well, is easy, but is bloody delicious and accessible. And *pāt tai* – well, you can't really escape from the cliché, however delicious it might be.

THE BEST FOOD 'HOOD?

It depends on what I'm looking for. Chinatown, for smoked duck or noodles. But if you want to eat Thai food, you need to go to the markets. Bangkok still has some remnants of the city or villages that it was. For Muslim food you can go down to the area near Haroon Mosque, near the Oriental Hotel (p109), or for Portuguese cakes, you can go to Santa Cruz (p75). There's still those types of areas.

YOUR FAVOURITE RESTAURANT

It changes all the time. I like Krua Apsorn (p119). It's local. It's good. It's unreformed. It's not too precious. They cook for Thais, they feed Thais and it is Thai.

THE BEST MARKET

Of course, Or Tor Kor (p140). Even though it's sanitised, its soul has not been expunged from it as it's modernised. There's some great stuff there.

BEST EATING ADVICE FOR A FIRST-TIME VISITOR

Just bloody well eat it – don't think about it – just eat it. It's so unlikely you'll get sick, but you will kick yourself for not actually just diving in. Go to places that look busiest, because they're busy for a reason. And a bit of food poisoning, well that adds local colour, doesn't it?

As told to Austin Bush

Luckily, less than a five-minute *túk-túk* ride away lies Thip Samai, also known by locals as *pāt tai Brádoō pēe*, and home to the most legendary *pāt tai* in town. For something a bit different, try the delicate egg-wrapped version, or the *pāt tai* fried with *man gūng* (decadent shrimp fat).

Khunkung

THAI \$\$

(Khun Kung Kitchen; Map p60; 77 Th Maha Rat; mains 75-280B; ☺lunch & dinner; ☹; bus 25, 32, 503, 508, river ferry Tha Chang) The restaurant of the Royal Navy Association has one of the few coveted riverfront locations along this stretch of the Chao Phraya. Locals come for the combination of riverfront views and cheap and tasty seafood-based eats. The

entrance to the restaurant is near the ATM machines at Tha Chang.

Hemlock

THAI \$\$

(Map p60; 56 Th Phra Athit; mains 60-220B; ☺4pm-midnight; ☹; bus 32, 33, 64, 82, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Taking full advantage of its cosy shophouse setting, this white-tablecloth local is an excellent intro to Thai food. The vast menu has the usual suspects, but also includes some dishes you'd be hard pressed to find elsewhere, as well as a strong veggie section.

Ann's Sweet

PASTRIES \$

(Map p60; 138 Th Phra Athit; mains 75-150B; ☺lunch & dinner; ☹; bus 32, 33, 64, 82, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Ann, a native of Bangkok and a gradu-

ate of the Cordon Bleu cooking program, makes some of the most authentic Western-style cakes you'll find anywhere in town.

CHINATOWN & PHAHURAT

When you mention Chinatown, most Bangkokians immediately dream of street food, the best of which we've included in our 'Eats Walk' on p123. The area is also famous as ground zero for the yearly Vegetarian Festival (see the boxed text, p122).

On the western side of the neighbourhood is Bangkok's Little India, the fabric district of Phahurat, filled with small Indian and Nepali restaurants tucked into the soi off Th Chakraphet.

Old Siam Plaza

THAI \$

(Map p76; ground fl, Old Siam Plaza, cnr Th Phahurat & Th Triphet; mains 15-50B; ☺9am-6.30pm; river ferry Tha Saphan Phut) Sugar junkies, be sure to include this stop on your Bangkok eating itinerary. The ground floor of this shopping centre is a candyland of traditional Thai sweets and snacks, most made right before your eyes.

Royal India

NORTHERN INDIAN \$\$

(Map p76; 392/1 Th Chakraphet; mains 65-250B; ☺lunch & dinner; river ferry Tha Saphan Phut) Yes, we realise that this legendary hole in the wall has been in every edition of our guide since the beginning, but after all these years it's still the most reliable place to eat in Bangkok's Little India. Try any of the deli-

cious breads or rich curries, and don't forget to finish with a homemade Punjabi sweet.

RIVERSIDE

Le Normandie

FRENCH \$\$\$

(Map p80; ☑0 2659 9000; www.mandarinoriental.com; 48 Soi Oriental/38, Th Charoen Krung; mains 750-3900B; ☺noon-2.30pm & 7-11pm Mon-Sat, 7-11 Sun; ☒; hotel shuttle boat from Tha Sathon/Central Pier) As the menu, which boasts an entire foie gras section, suggests, this is classic French cuisine, and no fewer than 20 three-starred Michelin chefs have helped to prepare it over the years. Dress appropriately.

SILOM & SATHON

Th Silom has a bit of everything, from truly old-skool Thai to some of the city's best upscale international dining.

D'Sens

FRENCH \$\$\$

(Map p82; ☑0 2200 9000; 22nd fl, Dusit Thani, 946 Th Phra Ram IV; set menu 1850-3100B; ☺11.30am-2.30pm & 6-10pm, 6-10pm Sat; ☒; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) Arguably Bangkok's best upscale *fa-ràng* (foreign) fine-dining restaurant, D'Sens is perched like an air traffic control tower atop the Dusit Thani hotel. A venture of French wonder-twins Laurent and Jacques Pourcel, creators of the Michelin-starred Le Jardin des Sens in Montpellier, France, the menu draws from the traditions of the south of France, relying mainly on high-quality French imports for its ingredients.

VEGING OUT IN BANGKOK

Vegetarianism is a growing trend among urban Thais, but veggie restaurants are still generally few and far between.

Banglamphu has the greatest concentration of vegetarian-friendly restaurants, thanks to the nonmeat-eating *fa-ràng* (foreigners); these are typically low-scale stir-fry shops that do something akin to what your hippie roommates have cooking in their kitchens. We like **May Kaidee** (Map p60; 33 Th Samsen; mains 50-100B; ☺lunch & dinner; ☒; bus 32, 516, river ferry Tha Phra Athit), which in addition to three branches around Th Khao San, also offers a veggie Thai cooking school, and **Ranee's** (Map p60; 77 Trok Mayom; dishes 70-320B; ☺breakfast, lunch & dinner; bus 32, 516, river ferry Tha Phra Athit), whose menu features a lengthy meat-free section.

Elsewhere in town, **Baan Suan Pai** (Map p118; Banana Family Park, Th Phahonyothin; mains 15-30B; ☺7am-3pm; BTS Ari), the **MBK Food Court** (p124), **Chennai Kitchen** (p122) and **Arawy** (Map p60; 152 Th Din So, Phra Nakhon; dishes 20-30B; ☺8am-8pm; bus 10, 12, klong taxi to Tha Phan Fah) all offer cheap but tasty meat-free meals. East of the city, upscale-ish Thai- and Italian-style veggie eats can be found at **Anotai** (976/17 Soi Rama 9 Hospital, Rama 9; dishes 150-303B; ☺10am-9pm Thu-Tue; ☒; MRT Phra Ram 9 & access by taxi).

During the vegetarian festival in October, the whole city goes mad for tofu (see the boxed text, p122). Stalls and restaurants indicate their nonmeat menu with yellow banners; Chinatown has the highest concentration of stalls.

Kalaprapuek

THAI \$\$

(Map p82; 27 Th Pramuan; mains 80-120B; ☺8am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun; 📍; BTS Surasak) This venerable Thai eatery has numerous branches and mall spin-offs around town, but we still like the quasi-concealed original branch. The diverse menu spans regional Thai specialties from just about every region, daily specials and, occasionally, seasonal treats as well.

Scoozie

PIZZA \$\$

(Map p82; 174 Th Surawong; pizzas 100-425B; ☺lunch & dinner; 📍; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) Now boasting several locations across Bangkok, we still think the wood-fired pizzas taste best at this, the original branch. However, if you find yourself elsewhere with a dough craving, you can also get a pie at the Th Sukhumvit **branch** (Map p92; Windsor Hotel, Soi 20, Th Sukhumvit; 📍; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit).

Somboon Seafood

CHINESE-THAI \$\$\$

(Map p82; 169/7-11 Th Surawong; mains 120-900B; ☺dinner; 📍; BTS Chong Nonsi) Holy seafood factory: ascending the many staircases to a free table might make you nervous about the quality of so much quantity. But Somboon's famous crab curry will make you messy and full. Dainty eaters can opt for the slightly more surgical pursuit of devouring a whole fried fish.

The Foodie

THAI \$\$

(Map p82; Soi Phiphat 2; mains 80-150B; ☺lunch & dinner; 📍; BTS Chong Nonsi) This airy, cafeteria-like restaurant boasts a menu of hard-to-find central- and southern-style Thai dishes. Highlights include the *yam sôm oh* (a spicy/sour/sweet salad of pomelo), and the spicy *prik kŭng Blah dòok foo*, catfish fried in a curry paste until crispy.

Chennai Kitchen

INDIAN \$

(Map p82; 10 Th Pan; mains 50-150B; ☺10am-3pm & 6-9.30pm; 📍; BTS Surasak) This thimble-sized restaurant puts out some of the most solid southern Indian vegetarian around. The arm-length dosas (a crispy southern Indian bread) are always a good choice, but if you're feeling indecisive go for the thali set that seems to incorporate just about everything in the kitchen.

Somtarn Convent

THAI \$

(Map p82; 2/4-5 Th Convent; mains 20-120B; ☺10.30am-9pm; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) Northeastern-style Thai food is usually relegated to less-than-hygienic stalls perched by the side of the road with no menu or English-speaking staff in sight. A less intimidating introduction to the wonders of *lâhp* (a minced meat 'salad'), *sôm-dam* (papaya salad) and other Isan delights can be had at this popular restaurant.

Soi 10 Food Centres

THAI \$

(Map p82; Soi 10, Th Silom; mains 20-60B; ☺lunch Mon-Fri; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) These two adjacent hangarlike buildings tucked behind Soi 10 are the main lunchtime fuelling stations for this area's office staff. Choices range from southern-style *kôw gaang* (point-and-choose curries ladled over rice) to virtually every form of Thai noodle.

Nadimos

LEBANESE \$\$

Map p82; Baan Silom, cnr Th Silom & Soi 19; mains 70-400B; ☺lunch & dinner; 📍; BTS Surasak, bus 15, 504) This semiformal dining room does tasty versions of all the Lebanese standards, plus quite a few dishes you'd never expect to see this far from Beirut. There's lots of vegetarian options as well.

WAVING THE YELLOW FLAG

During the annual Vegetarian Festival in September/October, Bangkok's Chinatown becomes a virtual orgy of nonmeat cuisine. The festivities centre on Chinatown's main street, Th Yaowarat, and the Talat Noi area (see p79), but food shops and stalls all over the city post yellow flags to announce their meat-free status.

Celebrating alongside the ethnic Chinese are Thais who look forward to the special dishes that appear during the festival period. Most restaurants put their normal menus on hold and instead prepare soy-based substitutes for standard Thai dishes such as *đôm yam* (spicy, sour soup) and *gaang kŕe-o wăhn* (green curry). Even Thai regional cuisines are sold without the meat. Of the special festival dishes, yellow Hokkien-style noodles appear in stir-fried dishes along with meaty mushrooms and big hunks of vegetables.

Along with abstinence from meat, the 10-day festival is celebrated with special visits to a temple, often requiring worshippers to dress in white.

CHINATOWN EATS WALK

Street food rules in this part of town and many of Chinatown's best kitchens don't require walls or a roof, making the area ideal for a food-based stroll.

Although many vendors stay open until the wee hours, the more popular stalls tend to sell out quickly, and the best time to feast in this area is from about 7pm to 9pm. Avoid Mondays, when most of the city's street vendors stay at home. A dish at just about any of the following stalls should set you back no more than 50B. Access to the area is by MRT to Hua Lamphong, followed by a brief walk or taxi ride.

Start your walk at the intersection of Th Yaowarat and Th Phadungdao. Moving west, turn right into Th Plaeng Nam. Immediately on your right is **Burapa Birds Nest** (Map p76; Th Plaeng Nam), as good a place as any to try the very Chinatown dish, birds' nest soup. Directly across from Burapa you'll see a gentleman on the street working three coal-fired stoves. This stall, **Khrua Phornlamai** (ครัวพระหมับ; Map p76; Th Plaeng Nam), is a great place for greasy but delicious fried faves such as *pât kêe mow* (wide rice noodles fried with seafood, chillies and Thai basil).

Continue down Th Plaeng Nam and cross Th Charoen Krung. Go straight, staying on the right-hand side for about 50m, until you reach **Nay Mong** (นายมอง; Map p76; 539 Th Phlap Phla Chai), a minuscule restaurant renowned for its delicious *hõy tõrt*, mussels or oysters fried with egg in a sticky batter.

Backtrack to Th Charoen Krung and turn right. Upon reaching Th Mangkorn make a right and immediately on your left-hand side you're bound to see a row of people waiting in line, as well as several more sitting on plastic stools holding plates of rice and curry in their hands. This is **Jék Pùi** (เจ๊กปุย; Map p76; Th Mangkorn), a stall known for its Chinese-style Thai curries and also for the fact that it has no tables.

Head left down Th Charoen Krung again and continue east until you reach Trõk It-saranuphap (Soi 16). This narrow alleyway is also known as **Talat Mai** (ตลาดใหม่), and is the area's most famous strip of commerce. Although morning is the best time to visit this market, if you're not too late you can still get a good idea of the exotic ingredients that define the area.

At the end of the alley you'll see a gentleman frying noodles with a brass wok and a spoon. He's making **gõo-ay dẽe-o kỏo-a gài** (ก๋วยเตี๋ยตัวไก่; Map p76), a simple but delicious dish of rice noodles fried with chicken, egg and garlic oil.

Upon emerging at Th Yaowarat, cross over to the busy market area directly across the street. The first vendor on the right, **Nay Lẻk Uan** (นายเล็กอาน; Map p76; Soi 11, Th Yaowarat), is among the most popular stalls in Bangkok, and sells *gõo-ay jấp nám sủi*, a thick, intensely peppery broth containing noodles and pork offal. There are several more stalls here, selling everything from *pât tai* to satay.

Walk east down Th Yaowarat, and on the corner of Th Yaowaphanit and Th Yaowarat you'll see a stall with yellow noodles and barbecued pork. This is **Mangkorn Khỏo** (มังกรนคร; Map p76; cnr Th Yaowarat & Th Yaowaphanit), a respected vendor of *bà-mẻe*, Chinese-style wheat noodles, and delicious wontons.

Keep walking down Th Yaowarat and you'll be back to where you started. By now the two opposing seafood places, **Lẻk & Rut** (Map p76; cnr Th Yaowarat & Th Phadungdao) and **T&K** (Map p76; cnr Th Yaowarat & Th Phadungdao) should be buzzing. You could join the tourists for grilled prawns and fried rice, but hopefully by this point you've had your fill of what Chinatown really has to offer.

Krua 'Aroy-Aroy'

(Map p82; Th Pan; mains 30-70B; ☺8am-8.30pm, closed 2nd & 4th Sun of each month; BTS Sura-sak) It can be crowded and hot, but Krua 'Aroy-Aroy' ('Delicious Kitchen') rarely fails to live up to its lofty name. Stop by

THAI \$

for some of Bangkok's richest curries, as well as a revolving menu of daily specials.

SIAM SQUARE & PRATUNAM

If you find yourself hungry in this part of central Bangkok, you're largely at the mercy of shopping-mall food courts and chain

i

DAY OFF

Fans of street food be forewarned that all of Bangkok's stalls close on Monday for compulsory street cleaning (the results of which are not entirely evident come Tuesday morning). If you happen to be in the city on this day, take advantage of the lull to perhaps visit one of the city's upscale hotel restaurants, which virtually never close.

restaurants. However, this is still Thailand, and if you can ignore the prefabricated atmosphere, the food can often be quite good. If you don't need air-con, stop by the numerous **food stalls** (Map p86; btwn Sois 5 & 6, Siam Sq; dishes 30-40B; ☺7am-6pm; BTS Siam) at Siam Sq for a quick Thai lunch.

**MBK Food Court**

THAI \$

(Map p86; 6th floor, MBK Center, cnr Th Phra Ram 1 & Th Phayathai; ☺10am-9pm; ☒; BTS National Stadium) The granddaddy of Bangkok food courts offers dozens of vendors selling dishes from virtually every corner of Thailand and beyond. It's a great introduction to Thai food, and standouts include an excellent vegetarian food stall (stall C8) and a very decent Isan food vendor (C22). To pay you must first exchange your cash for a temporary credit card at one of several counters; your change is refunded at the same desk.

Crystal Jade La Mian Xiao**Long Bao**

CHINESE \$\$

(Map p86; Urban Kitchen, basement, Erawan Bangkok, 494 Th Ploenchit; dishes 120-400B; ☺lunch & dinner; ☒; BTS Chit Lom) The tongue-twistingly long name of this excellent Singaporean chain refers to the restaurant's signature wheat noodles (*la mian*) and the famous Shanghainese steamed dumplings (*xiao long bao*). If you order the hand-pulled noodles, allow the staff to cut them with kitchen shears, otherwise you'll end up with evidence of your meal on your shirt.

Erawan Tea Room

THAI \$\$

Map p86; 2nd fl Erawan Bangkok, 494 Th Ploenchit; mains 170-450B; ☺lunch & dinner; ☒; BTS Chit Lom) The oversized chairs, panoramic windows and variety of hot drinks make this one of Bangkok's best places to catch up with the paper. The lengthy menu, with an emphasis on regional Thai dishes, will likely encourage you to linger a bit longer.

Coca Suki

THAI-CHINESE \$\$

(Map p86; 416/3-8 Th Henri Dunant; mains 60-200B; ☺11am-11pm; ☒; BTS Siam) Immensely popular with Thai families, *sù-gêe* takes the form of a bubbling hotpot of broth and the raw ingredients to dip therein. Coca is one of the oldest purveyors of the dish, and the Siam Sq branch reflects the brand's efforts to appear more modern.

Sanguan Sri

THAI \$

(Map p86; 59/1 Th Witthayu/Wireless Rd; mains 40-150B; ☺10am-3pm Mon-Sat; ☒; BTS Ploen Chit) If you don't manage to walk right past it, join the area's hungry office workers at this old-school Thai eatery. There's a limited English-language menu, but simply pointing to the delicious dishes being consumed around you is probably a better strategy.

New Light Coffee**House**

INTERNATIONAL-THAI \$\$

(Map p86; 426/1-4 Siam Sq; dishes 60-200B; ☺11am-2pm & 6-10pm; ☒; BTS Siam) Travel back in time to 1960s-era Bangkok at this vintage diner popular with students from nearby Chulalongkorn University. Try old-style Western dishes, all of which come accompanied by a soft roll and green salad, or choose from the extensive Thai menu.

SUKHUMVIT

This seemingly endless ribbon of a road is where to go if you wish to forget you're in Thailand. From Korean to Middle Eastern, just about every cuisine has an outpost here. We've mentioned a few Thai places following, but most domestic eats in this area are more miss than hit, and it's really the place to indulge in the flavours you left at home.

Lower Sukhumvit**Nasir al-Masri**

MIDDLE EASTERN \$\$

(Map p92; 4/6 Soi 3/1, Th Sukhumvit; mains 80-350B; ☺24hr; ☒; BTS Nana) One of several similar Middle Eastern restaurants on Soi 3/1, Nasir al-Masri is easily recognisable by its genuinely impressive floor-to-ceiling stainless steel 'theme'. Middle Eastern food generally means meat, meat and more meat, but there are also several delicious veggie-based mezze.

Bed Supperclub

INTERNATIONAL \$\$\$

(Map p92; ☎0 2651 3537; 26 Soi 11, Th Sukhumvit; mains 450-990B, set meals 790-1850B; ☺7.30-10pm Tue-Thu, dinner 9pm Fri & Sat; ☒; BTS Nana) Within this sleek and futuristic setting – beds instead of tables and contemporary

performances instead of mood music – the food stands up to the distractions with a changing menu described as ‘modern eclectic cuisine’. Dining is à la carte except on Fridays and Saturdays when there’s a four-course surprise menu served at 9pm sharp.

Tapas Café

SPANISH \$\$

(Map p92; 1/25 Soi 11, Th Sukhumvit; mains 75-750B; ☺11am-midnight; ☑; BTS Nana) If vibrant tapas, refreshing sangria and an open, airy atmosphere aren’t reasons enough to eat here, consider that before 7pm dishes and drinks are buy-two, get-one-free.

Upper Sukhumvit

Boon Tong Kiat Singapore

Hainanese Chicken Rice

SINGAPOREAN \$

(Map p92; 440/5 Soi 55/Thong Lor, Th Sukhumvit; dishes 60-150B; ☺lunch & dinner; ☑; BTS Thong Lo) Order a plate of the restaurant’s namesake and bear witness to how a dish can be

simultaneously simple and profound. And while you’re here you’d be daft not order *ro-jak*, the spicy/sour fruit ‘salad’, which here is cheekily called ‘Singapore Som Tam’.

Sukhumvit Plaza

KOREAN \$\$\$

(Korean Town; Map p92; cnr Soi 12 & Th Sukhumvit; ☺lunch & dinner; ☑; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) Known around Bangkok as ‘Korean Town’, this multistorey complex is the city’s best destination for authentic ‘Seoul’ food. Expats Koreans swear by **Myeong Ga** (Map p92; ☺0 2229 4658; mains 200-550B; ☺dinner; ☑) on the ground floor, although there are slightly cheaper places in the complex as well.

Le Beaulieu

FRENCH \$\$\$

(Map p92; ☺0 2204 2004; 50 Soi 19, Th Sukhumvit; set lunch/dinner from 525/1950B; ☺11.30am-3pm & 6.30-11pm; ☑; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) This tiny service hotel-bound restaurant is considered by many residents to be Bangkok’s

PRETTY THAI FOR A WHITE GUY

Starting around 2009, a handful of foreigners decided to open up Thai restaurants in Bangkok. The Thais can be very, well, protective about their cuisine, and the chefs involved generated a huge amount of local and international press – not all of it positive (one Thai food critic accused a well known foreign restaurateur of ‘slapping the faces of Thai people’). The storm has since passed, and in its wake we reap the benefit of several excellent Thai restaurants.

» **nahm** (Map p90; ☺0 2625 3333; Metropolitan Hotel, 27 Th Sathon Tai; set meal 1500B; ☺dinner; ☑; MRT Lumpini) Australian chef/author David Thompson (see the boxed text, p120) is behind what is quite possibly the best Thai restaurant in Bangkok. Taking his inspiration largely from antique texts, the dishes range from the exotic (spicy stir-fried frog with chillies, turmeric holy basil and cumin leaves) to the adventurous (fermented fish simmered with minced prawns and pork with chillies, galangal and green peppercorn), with bold flavours and artful presentation as a unifying thread. If you’re expecting bland, gentrified Thai food meant for foreigners, prepare to be disappointed. Reservations recommended.

» **Bo.ian** (Map p92; ☺0 2260 2962; 42 Soi Rongnarong Pichai Songkhram, Soi 26, Th Sukhumvit; set meal 1500B; ☺dinner Tue-Sun; BTS Phrom Phong) Bo and Dylan (Bo.ian, a play on words that also means ‘ancient’), former chefs at London’s nahm, have provided Bangkok with a compelling reason to reconsider upscale Thai cuisine. The couple’s scholarly approach to Thai cooking takes the form of seasonal set meals featuring dishes you’re not likely to find elsewhere.

» **Soul Food Mahanakorn** (Map p92; ☺0 2714 7708; 56/10 Soi 55/Thong Lor, Th Sukhumvit; mains 120-250B; ☺dinner; ☑; BTS Thong Lo) Started up by a native of Pennsylvania, this cosy bar-restaurant does tasty but pricey takes on rustic Thai dishes such as *gàì tórt Hat Yai* (southern-style fried chicken), and *gaeng hang lair*, a northern-style pork curry, not to mention great cocktails.

» **Sra Bua** (Map p86; ☺0 2162 9000; Siam Kempinski Hotel, 991/9 Th Rama I; set meal 2400B; ☺noon-3pm & 6-11pm Mon-Fri, 6-11pm Sat & Sun; ☑; BTS Siam) Helmed by a Thai and a Dane whose Copenhagen restaurant, Kiin Kiin, scored a Michelin star, Sra Bua takes a correspondingly international approach to Thai food – think frozen red curry with lobster. It’s behind the Siam Paragon.

BRUNCH BUFFET BONANZA

Sunday brunch has become something of a Bangkok institution among resident foreigners, and virtually every large hotel in town puts together decadent buffets on every other day as well. The following choices will leave you with more than simply a distended stomach.

The highly regarded restaurants at the **Four Seasons Hotel** (Map p86; ☎0 2250 1000; 155 Th Ratchadamri; buffet 2766B; ☀11.30am-3pm Sun; ☎; BTS Ratchadamri) set up steam tables for their decadent Sunday brunch buffet – reservations are essential.

Even if you can't afford to stay at the Oriental Hotel, you should save up for the river-side seafood buffet at **Lord Jim's** (Map p80; ☎0 2659 9000; 48 Soi Oriental/38, Th Charoen Krung; buffet 1472-1943B; ☀noon-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am-3pm Sat, 11am-3pm Sun; ☎; river ferry Tha Oriental).

The award-winning buffet at US chain **JW Marriott** (Map p92; ☎0 2656 7700; ground fl, JW Marriott Hotel, 4 Soi 2, Th Sukhumvit; buffet Sat/Sun 1285/1885B; ☀11.30am-3pm Sat & Sun; ☎; BTS Nana) is likened to Thanksgiving all year-round, and generous options for free-flowing beer or wine are also available.

Rang Mahal (Map p92; ☎0 2261 7100; 26th fl, Rembrandt Hotel, 19 Soi 20, Th Sukhumvit; buffet 850B; ☀11am-2.30pm Sun; ☎; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit), on the top of the Rembrandt Hotel, couples great views with an all-Indian buffet every Sunday.

And for those who love the sweet stuff, the **Sukhothai Hotel** (Map p90; ☎0 2344 8888; 13/3 Th Sathon Tai; buffet 800B; ☀2-5.30pm Fri-Sun; ☎; MRT Lumpini) offers a unique, entirely cocoa-based chocolate buffet.

best place for French cuisine. The menu ranges from the classic (steak tartare, bouillabaisse) to the modern (minute of scrambled eggs and fresh sea urchin), with dishes prepared using both unique imported ingredients and produce from Thailand's Royal Projects. Reservations recommended.

Bei Otto

GERMAN \$\$\$

(Map p92; www.beiotto.com; 1 Soi 20, Th Sukhumvit; mains 220-590B; ☀9am-midnight; ☎; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) Claiming a Bangkok residence for nearly 20 years, Bei Otto's major culinary bragging point is its pork knuckles, reputedly the best in town. A good selection of German beers and an attached delicatessen with brilliant breads and super sausages make it even more attractive to go Deutsch.

Serenade

INTERNATIONAL \$\$\$

(Map p92; ☎0 2713 8409; 264/1 Soi 12, Soi 55/Thong Lor, Th Sukhumvit; mains 145-480B; ☀lunch & dinner; ☎; BTS Thong Lo & access by taxi) This sexy new wine bar excels in tasty tapas-like dishes such as Greek olives and white anchovy sauté on baguette with melted Manchego cheese, or Grilled grass-fed Australian black angus strip loin with *jim jaew* demiglace.

Bharani

THAI \$

(Sansab Boat Noodle; Map p92; 96/14 Soi 23, Th Sukhumvit; mains 50-200B; ☀10am-10pm; ☎; BTS

Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) This cosy Thai restaurant dabbles in a bit of everything, from ox-tongue stew to rice fried with shrimp paste, but the real reason to come is for the rich, meaty 'boat noodles' – so called because they used to be sold from boats plying the *klorngs* (canals) of Ayuthaya.

Bacco – Osteria da Sergio

ITALIAN \$\$\$

(Map p92; 35/1 Soi 53, Th Sukhumvit; antipasti 100-1200B, mains 250-850B; ☀lunch & dinner; ☎; BTS Thong Lo) The slightly cheesy interior of this osteria serves as something of a cover for one of Bangkok's better Italian menus. There's an abundance of delicious antipasti, but the emphasis here is breads, from pizza to piada, all of which are done exceedingly well.

Duc de Praslin

CHOCOLATE \$

(Map p92; ground fl, RSU Tower, Soi 31/1, Th Sukhumvit; mains 20-120B; ☀8am-9pm; ☎; BTS Phrom Phong) Travel from sweaty Bangkok to Olde Europe in one step at this classy cafe-slash-chocolatier. Other than the spot-on bonbons and good coffee, try a hot cocoa, made in front of your eyes by combining steaming milk with shards of rich chocolate.

Face

INTERNATIONAL \$\$\$

(Map p92; ☎0 2713 6048; 29 Soi 38, Th Sukhumvit; mains 310-670B; ☀lunch & dinner; ☎; BTS Thong Lo) This handsome dining complex is

essentially three very good restaurants in one: Lan Na Thai does solid upscale Thai, Misaki focuses on the Japanese end of things, while Hazara dabbles in exotic-sounding 'North Indian frontier cuisine'.

Thonglee

THAI \$

(Map p92; Soi 20, Th Sukhumvit; mains 40-100B; ☺lunch & dinner, closed 3rd Sun of the month; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) One of the few remaining mom-and-pop Thai places on Th Sukhumvit, this tiny kitchen offers a few dishes you won't find elsewhere, such as *môo pát gà-Bì* (pork fried with shrimp paste) and *mèe gròrp* (sweet-and-spicy crispy fried noodles).

Mokkori

JAPANESE \$

(Map p92; 8/3 Soi 55/Thong Lor, Th Sukhumvit; mains 70-130B; ☺lunch & dinner; ☑; BTS Thong Lo) You know you're in the right place if, upon entering this restaurant, the staff drop everything they're doing and scream at you. Tiny Mokkori serves Japanese-style ramen in a resoundingly authentic setting, and many agree they do one of the better bowls in town. In addition to noodles, be sure to order the wonderfully simple snack of cucumber chunks served with a spicy miso dipping sauce.

Soi 38 Night Market

THAI-CHINESE \$

(Map p92; Soi 38, Th Sukhumvit; mains 30-60B; ☺8pm-3am; BTS Thong Lo) After a hard night of clubbing, this gathering of basic Chinese-Thai hawker stalls will look like a shimmering oasis. If you're going sober, stick to the knot of 'famous' vendors tucked into an alley on the right-hand side as you enter the street.

LUMPHINI PARK & TH PHRA RAM IV



Kai Thort Jay Kee

THAI \$

(Soi Polo Fried Chicken; Map p90; 137/1-3 Soi Sanam Khlii (Polo), Th Withayu/Wireless Rd; mains 40-280B; ☺lunch & dinner; ☑; MRT Lumpini) Although the *sôm-dam*, sticky rice and *lâhp* (a Thai-style 'salad' of minced meat) give the impression of a northeastern Thai-style eatery, the restaurant's namesake deep-fried bird is more southern in origin. Regardless, smothered in a thick layer of crispy deep-fried garlic, it is none other than a truly Bangkok experience.

Ngwan Lee Lang Suan

CHINESE-THAI \$\$

(Map p90; cnr Th Lang Suan & Soi Sarasin; mains 50-900B; ☺7am-3am; BTS Ratchadamri) This cavernous food hall is centrally located and open late, making it a perfect post-clubbing destination. It's also a great place to try those

dishes you never dare to order elsewhere such as *jàp chàì*, Chinese-style stewed veggies, or the delicious *Bèt đũn*, duck stewed in Chinese spices.

Café 1912

FRENCH-THAI \$\$

(Map p90; Alliance Française, 29 Th Sathon Tai; dishes 50-185B; ☺7am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun; ☑; MRT Lumpini) Part of the French cultural centre, and with food provided by a good local bakery, this cafeteria is a great place to fuel up while on an embassy run. Both French and Thai dishes are available, as well as coffee and delicious cakes and sweets.

GREATER BANGKOK

Mallika

SOUTHERN THAI \$\$

(Map p97; 21/36 Th Rang Nam; mains 70-480B; ☺10am-10pm Mon-Sat; ☑; BTS Victory Monument) A dream come true: authentic regional Thai (southern, in this case), with a legible English menu, good service and a tidy setting. The prices are slightly high for a mom-and-pop Thai joint, but you're paying for quality.

Kaloang Home Kitchen

THAI \$\$

(Map p96; 503-505 Th Samsen; mains 60-170B; ☺11am-11pm; bus 32, 516, river ferry Tha Thewet) Don't be alarmed by the peeling paint and the dilapidated deck – Kaloang Home Kitchen certainly isn't. The laid-back atmosphere and seafood-heavy menu will quickly dispel any concerns about sinking into the Mae Nam Chao Phraya, and a beer and the breeze will temporarily erase any scarring memories of Bangkok traffic. To reach the restaurant, follow Th Si Ayuthaya until you reach the river.

Phat Thai Ari

THAI \$

(no roman-script sign; Map p118; 2/1-2 Soi Ari/7, Th Phahonyothin; mains 45-100B; ☺11am-10pm; BTS Ari) One of the city's better-known *pàt tai* shops is located a couple of blocks from the eponymous soi. Try the innovative 'noodleless' version, where long strips of crispy green papaya are substituted for the traditional rice noodles from Chanthaburi. Phat Thai Ari is located on the narrow soi that leads to Phaholyothin Center, north of BTS Ari.

Pathé

THAI \$

(Map p118; cnr Th Lat Phrao & Th Viphawadee; mains 75-160B; ☺2pm-1am; ☑; MRT Phahon Yothin) The Thai equivalent of a 1950s-era US diner, this popular place combines solid Thai food, a fun atmosphere and a jukebox playing scratched records. Don't miss the deep-fried ice cream.

THE WHISKY SET

Thai beer is generally more miss than hit, so the next time you're out on the town, why not drink like the Thais do and order a bottle of whisky?

Your first step is to choose a brand. For a particularly decadent night out, the industry standard is a bottle of *bláak* (Johnnie Walker Black Label). Those on a budget can go for the cheaper imported labels such as Red Label or Benmore, and a rock-bottom but fun night can be had on domestic spirits such as 100 Pipers or Sang Som. And it's not unusual to bring your own bottle to many Thai bars, although some might charge a modest corkage fee.

As any Thai can tell you, your next immediate concern is mixers. These will take the form of several bottles of soda water and a bottle or two of Coke, along with a pail of ice. Most waiters will bring these to you as a matter of course.

Mixing is the easiest step and requires little or no action on your part; your skilled waiter will fill your glass with ice, followed by a shot of whisky, a splash of soda, a top-off of Coke and, finally, a swirl with the ice tongs to bring it all together.

If you can't finish your bottle, shame on you, but don't fret, as it's perfectly normal to keep it at the bar. Simply tell your trusted waiter, who will write your name and the date on the bottle and keep it for your next visit.

River Bar Café

THAI \$\$

(405/1 Soi Chao Phraya, Th Ratchawithi, Thonburi; mains 130-350B; ☺5pm-midnight; ☎; klong taxi to Tha Krung Thon Bridge pier) Sporting a picture-perfect riverside location, good food and live music, the River Bar Café combines all the essentials for a perfect Bangkok night out.



Drinking

Once infamous as an anything-goes night-life destination, in recent years Bangkok has been edging towards teetotalism with strict regulations limiting the sale of alcohol and increasingly conservative closing times. Regardless, the city still boasts a diverse and fun bar scene, and there are even a few places to go if you find 1am too early to get back on the wagon.

Keep in mind that smoking has been outlawed at all indoor (and some quasi-outdoor) entertainment places since 2008. Surprisingly for Thailand, the rule is strictly enforced.

KO RATANAKOSIN, BANGLAMPHU & THONBURI

During the day, Th Khao San is dominated by just about everybody but Thais. At night the natives deem it safe to join the crowds, giving the area an entirely different atmosphere. In addition to the main strip, Th Rambuttri and Th Phra Athit also draw drinkers and fun seekers from across the city, and the world.

Hippie de Bar

BAR

(Map p60; 46 Th Khao San; ☺6pm-2am; river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Popular with the domestic crowd, Hippie boasts several levels of fun, both indoor and outdoor. There's food, pool tables and a soundtrack you're unlikely to hear elsewhere in town.

Amorosa

BAR

Map p60; www.arunresidence.com; rooftop, Arun Residence, 36-38 Soi Pratu Nok Yung; ☺6-11pm; bus 123, 508, river ferry Tha Tien) It may be the only bar in the area, but that doesn't mean it's any sort of compromise; Amorosa's rooftop location packs killer views of Wat Arun, making it one of the best spots in Bangkok for a riverside sundowner.

Rolling Bar

BAR

(Map p60; Th Prachathipatai; ☺6pm-midnight; klong taxi Tha Phan Fah) An escape from hectic Th Khao San is a good enough excuse to shlep to this quiet canal-side boozier. Tasty bar snacks and live music are excuses to stay.

Taksura

BAR

(Map p60; 156/1 Th Tanao; ☺5pm-midnight; klong taxi Tha Phan Fah) There are no signs to lead you to this seemingly abandoned century-old mansion in the heart of old Bangkok, which is all the better, according to the cool uni-artsy crowd who frequent the place.

Phranakorn Bar

BAR

(Map p60; 58/2 Soi Damnoen Klang Tai; ☺6pm-midnight; klong taxi Tha Phan Fah) It must have

taken a true visionary to transform this characterless multilevel building into a warm, fun destination for a night out. Students and arty types make Phranakorn Bar a home away from hovel with eclectic decor and changing gallery exhibits.

Bars tend to segregate into foreigner and Thai factions, but you can always reverse that trend. Here are a few popular options:

Center Khao San BAR
(Map p60; Th Khao San; ☎24hr; river ferry Tha Phra Athit) One of many front-row views of the human parade on Th Khao San. The upstairs bar hosts late-night bands.

Mulligans BAR
(Map p60; 1st fl, Buddy Lodge, 265 Th Khao San; ☎3pm-4am; river ferry Tha Phra Athit; ☎) Irish/colonial-themed bar for when only air-con will do.

Molly Bar BAR
(Map p60; Th Rambutri; ☎8pm-1am; river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Packed on weekends for live music; it's more mellow on weekdays with outdoor seating.

Roof Bar BAR
(Map p60; Th Khao San; ☎5pm-midnight; river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Although the live acoustic soundtrack is hit and miss, the views of Th Khao San are solid from this elevated pub.

SILOM & SATHON

Barbican Bar BAR
(Map p82; 9/4-5 Soi Thaniya, Th Silom; ☎4pm-1am; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom; ☎) Surrounded by massage parlours with teenage prom queens cat-calling at Japanese businessmen, this is a straight-laced yuppie bar where office crews come for some happy-hour drinks and stay until closing time.

Coyote on Convent BAR
(Map p82; 1/2 Th Convent, Th Silom; ☎11am-midnight; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom; ☎) Forget the overpriced Tex-Mex cuisine; the real reason to visit Coyote is for its 75-plus varieties of margaritas. On Wednesdays from 6pm to 8pm and Saturdays from 10pm to midnight, the icy drinks are distributed free to all women who pass through the door.

Molly Malone's IRISH BAR
(Map p82; 1/5-6 Th Convent, Th Silom; ☎11am-1am; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom; ☎) A recent make-over has this longstanding local leaning perilously towards Irish kitsch, but it still pulls a fun crowd and the service is friendly and fast.

SIAM SQUARE & PRATUNAM

Co-Co Walk BAR, LIVE MUSIC
(Map p86; 87/70 Th Phayathai; ☎6pm-1am; BTS Ratthathewi) This covered compound is a smorgasbord of pubs, bars and live music popular with Thai university students. **The Tube** left its heart in London, and is heavy on the Brit Pop, **Chilling House Café** features Thai

OUT ALL NIGHT

With most pubs and dance clubs closing around 1am, One Night in Bangkok is not quite what it used to be. Thankfully, there are a few places around town that have gained sufficient 'permission' to stay open until the morning hours.

Off Soi Ngam Duphli, **Wong's Place** (Map p90; 27/3 Soi Si Bamphen, Th Phra Ram IV; ☎8pm-late; MRT Lumpini; ☎), a longstanding backpacker bar, is so late-night, it's best not to show up before midnight.

Vaguely Middle Eastern-themed **Gazebo** (Map p60; 3rd fl, 44 Th Chakraphong; river ferry Tha Phra Athit) represents the posh side of the Th Khao San area. This bar's elevated setting appears to lend it some leniency with the city's strict closing times.

On Th Sukhumvit, **Club Insomnia** (Map p92; Soi 12, Th Sukhumvit; admission 200B; ☎8pm-late; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) and **Scratch Dog** (Map p92; ☎0 2262 1234; Windsor Suites Hotel, 8-10 Soi 20, Th Sukhumvit; ☎8pm-late; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) employ a Top 40 hip-hop and R&B soundtrack to propel partiers into the morning hours.

For something a bit edgier, ask your friendly taxi driver to escort you to any of the following: **Shock 39**, **Spicy**, **Spice Club**, **Boss** or **Bossy**. These creatively named late-night clubs are all located in central Bangkok and stay open until well past sunrise. We'd tell you a bit more about them and put them on our maps, but our experience and research suggest that these clubs exist in an alternate late-night reality that only Bangkok taxi drivers can navigate...

hits played by live acoustic guitar and a few pool tables, and **69** sets the pace with cover bands playing Western rock staples and current hits.

Hyde & Seek

BAR

(Map p86; ground fl, Athenee Residence, 65/1 Soi Ruam Rudi; ☎11am-1am; BTS Phloen Chit; ☎) The tasty and comforting English-inspired bar snacks and meals have earned Hyde & Seek the right to call itself a 'gastro bar', but we reckon the real reasons to come here are arguably Bangkok's most well-stocked bar and some of the city's best cocktails.

To-Sit

RESTAURANT-BAR

(Map p86; Soi 3, Siam Sq, Th Phra Ram 1; ☎6pm-midnight; BTS Siam; ☎) To-Sit epitomises everything a Thai university student could wish for on a night out: sappy Thai music and cheap, spicy eats.

SUKHUMVIT

WTF

GALLERY, BAR

(Map p92; www.wtfbangkok.com; 7 Soi 51, Th Sukhumvit; ☎6pm-1am Tue-Sun; BTS Thong Lo; ☎) No, not that WTF; Wonderful Thai Friendship combines a cozy bar and an art gallery in one attractive package. Throw in some of Bangkok's best cocktails and some delicious Spanish-influenced bar snacks, and you won't need another destination for the evening.

Bangkok Bar

BAR

(Map p92; Soi Ekamai 2, Soi 63/Ekamai, Th Sukhumvit; ☎8pm-1am; BTS Ekkamai; ☎) Bounce with Thai indie kids at this fun, but astonishingly uncreatively named bar. There's live music, and the eats are strong enough to make Bangkok Bar a dinner destination in itself. And we double-dog dare you to walk a straight line after two Mad Dogs, the infamous house drink.

GAY & LESBIAN BANGKOK

Bangkok is so gay it makes San Francisco look like rural Texas. With out-and-open nightspots and annual pride events, the city's homosexual community enjoys an unprecedented amount of tolerance considering attitudes in the rest of the region. It should be mentioned, however, that recent years have seen a sharp rise in HIV and other STDs among gay men in Bangkok; when in town, be sure to play it safe.

Utopia (www.utopia-asia.com) is an online resource for the Southeast Asian gay community, listing Bangkok entertainment venues, news and views, and providing travel services. **Dreaded Ned** (www.dreadedned.com) and **Fridae** (www.fridae.com) also have up to date listings and events. The **Lesbian Guide to Bangkok** (www.bangkoklesbian.com) is the only English-language tracker of the lesbian scene.

Gay women and men are well advised to visit Bangkok in mid-November, when the city's small but fun **Pride Festival** (www.bangkokpride.org) is in full swing. Dinners, cruises, clubbing and contests are the order of the week.

Bed Supperclub (see p134) hosts the hugely popular 'Confidential Sundays', and other posh locales often play host to weekend-long 'circuit parties'. Visit **G Circuit** (www.gcircuit.com) to find out when and where the next one is.

Soi 2 on Th Silom is lined with dance clubs, such as **DJ Station** (Map p82; 8/6-8 Soi 2, Th Silom; ☎8pm-late; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom), where the crowd is a mix of Thai guppies (gay professionals), money boys and a few Westerners. Just half a soi over is **G.O.D.** (Guys on Display; Map p82; Soi 2/1, Th Silom; cover 280B; ☎8pm-late; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom), which as the name suggests is not averse to a little shirtless dancing. Traipse on over to Soi 4 to find the old-timer conversation bars, such as **Balcony** (Map p82; www.balconypub.com; 86-88 Soi 4, Th Silom; ☎5.30pm-1am; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) and **Telephone** (Map p82; 114/11-13 Soi 4, Th Silom; ☎5pm-1am; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom).

Further out of town is a more local scene, where a little Thai will make you feel more welcome. Several of the bars along Th Kamphaeng Phet, including **Fake Club** (Map p118; Th Kamphaeng Phet, Chatuchak; ☎9pm-2am; BTS Mo Chit, MRT Kamphaeng Phet) and **el Ninyo** (Map p118; Th Kamphaeng Phet, Chatuchak; ☎9pm-2am; BTS Mo Chit, MRT Kamphaeng Phet), are popular on weekends for loud and lushy behaviour.

Zeta (29/67 Royal City Ave/RCA, off Phra Ram IX; admission 100B; ☎8pm-2am; MRT Phra Ram 9 & access by taxi) is an easy-going club for the girls with a nightly band doing Thai and Western covers.

Cheap Charlie's

BAR

(Map p92; Soi 11, Th Sukhumvit; ☺Mon-Sat; BTS Nana) There's never enough seating, and the design concept is best classified as 'junkyard,' but on most nights this chummy open-air beer corner is a great place to meet everybody, from package tourists to resident English teachers.

Iron Fairies

PUB, WINE BAR

(Map p92; www.theironfairies.com; Soi 55/Thong Lor, Th Sukhumvit; ☺5pm-midnight Mon-Sat; BTS Thong Lo; ☹) Imagine, if you can, an abandoned fairy factory in Paris c 1912, and you'll get an idea of the design theme at this popular pub-wine bar. If you manage to wrangle one of a handful of seats, the staff claim to serve Bangkok's 'best burgers' and there's live music after 9.30pm.

Tuba

BAR

(Off map p92; 34 Room 11-12 A, Soi Ekamai 21, Soi Ekamai/63, Th Sukhumvit; BTS Ekkamai; ☹) Part storage room for over-the-top vintage furniture, part friendly local boozier, this bizarre bar certainly doesn't lack in character. Indulge in a whole bottle for once and don't miss the delicious chicken wings.

Bull's Head

PUB

(Map p92; ☎0 2259 4444; 595/10-11 Soi 33/1, Th Sukhumvit; ☺5pm-1am; BTS Phrom Phong; ☹) Bangkok boasts several English-style pubs but this is probably the most authentic of the lot. With friendly management and staff, and more events and activities than a summer camp, it's also a good place to meet people, particularly those of the British persuasion.

HOBS

PUB

(House of Beers; Map p92; 522/3 Soi Thong Lo 16, Soi 55/Thong Lor, Th Sukhumvit; ☺11am-midnight; BTS Thong Lo; ☹) Arguably the world's best brews, Belgian beers have been fleetingly available around Bangkok for a while now, but have found a permanent home at this new pub. Be sure to accompany your beer with a bowl of crispy *frites*, served here Belgian-style with mayonnaise.

**Entertainment**

Shame on you if you find yourself bored in Bangkok. And even more shame if you think the only entertainment options involve the word 'go-go'. Nowadays Bangkok's nightlife is as diverse as that of virtually any modern city. And even if you're usually in bed by 9pm, Bangkok still offers interesting post-

dinner diversions, from flash cinemas to traditional cultural performances.

Live Music

Music is an essential element of a Thai night out, and just about every pub worth its salted peanuts has a house band of varying quality. For the most part this means perky Thai pop covers or tired international standards (if you've left town without having heard a live version of *Hotel California*, you haven't really been to Bangkok), but an increasing number of places are starting to deviate from the norm with quirky and/or inspired bands and performances.

Brick Bar

BAR, LIVE MUSIC

(Map p60; basement, Buddy Lodge, 265 Th Khao San; ☺8pm-1am; river ferry Tha Phra Athit; ☹) This cavelike pub hosts a nightly revolving cast of live music for an almost exclusively Thai crowd. Come at midnight, wedge yourself into a table a few inches from the horn section, and lose it to Teddy Ska, one of the most energetic live acts in town.

Living Room

HOTEL LOUNGE, JAZZ

(Map p92; ☎0 2649 8888; Level I, Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit, 250 Th Sukhumvit; ☺6.30pm-midnight; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit; ☹) Don't let looks deceive you; every night this bland hotel lounge transforms into the city's best venue for live jazz. Contact ahead of time to see which sax master or hide hitter is currently in town.

Diplomat Bar

HOTEL LOUNGE

(Map p86; ground fl, Conrad Hotel, 87 Th Witthayu/Wireless Rd; ☺6pm-midnight; BTS Phloen Chit; ☹) This is one of the few hotel lounges that the locals make a point of visiting. Choose from an expansive list of innovative martinis and sip to live jazz (from 6.30pm to midnight), played gracefully at conversation level.

Parking Toys

LIVE MUSIC

(☎0 2907 2228; 17/22 Soi Mayalap, Kaset-Navamin Hwy; ☺6pm-1am; BTS Mo Chit & access by taxi; ☹) Essentially a rambling shed stuffed with vintage furniture, Parking Toys hosts an eclectic revolving cast of fun bands ranging in genre from acoustic/classical ensembles to electro-funk jam acts. To get here, take a taxi heading north from BTS Mo Chit and tell the driver to take you to Th Kaset-Navamin. Upon passing the second stop light on this road, look for the small Heineken sign on your left.

DRINKING WITH THE STARS

Bangkok is one of the few big cities in the world where nobody seems to mind if you set up the odd bar or restaurant on the top of a skyscraper. Note that reservations are recommended for the more restaurant-like of the following, and none allow shorts or sandals wearers.

- » **Moon Bar at Vertigo** (Map p90; Banyan Tree Hotel, 21/100 Th Sathon Tai; ☎5.30pm-1am; MRT Lumpini) Precariously perched on the top of 61 floors of skyscraper, Moon Bar offers a bird's-eye view of Bangkok. Things can get a bit crowded here come sunset, so be sure to show up a bit early to get the best seats.
- » **Sirocco Sky Bar** (Map p80; The Dome, 1055 Th Silom; ☎6pm-1am; BTS Saphan Taksin) Descend the sweeping stairs like a Hollywood diva to the precipice bar of this rooftop restaurant that looks over the Mae Nam Chao Phraya.
- » **Nest** (Map p92; ☎0 2255 0638; www.nestbangkok.com; 8th fl, Le Fenix Hotel, 33/33 Soi 11, Th Sukhumvit; ☎5pm-2am; BTS Nana) Perched on the roof of the Le Fenix Hotel, Nest is a chic maze of cleverly concealed sofas and inviting daybeds. A DJ soundtrack and one of the most interesting pub grub menus in town bring things back down to ground level.
- » **Long Table** (Map p92; ☎0 2302 2557; 25th fl, 48 Column Building, Soi 16, Th Sukhumvit; ☎5pm-2am; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit; ☎) Not exactly a roof-topper, but the open-air section of this upscale Thai restaurant-slash-bar provides great views over one of Bangkok's busiest central districts.
- » **RedSky** (Map p86; ☎0 2100 1234; 55th fl, Centara Grand, Central World Plaza; ☎5pm-1am; BTS Siam & Chit Lom) Bangkok's most recent rooftop dining venture is probably the most formal of the lot, and boasts an extensive martini menu.
- » **Roof** (Map p86; 25th fl, Siam@Siam, 865 Th Phra Ram I; ☎5.30pm-12.30am; BTS National Stadium) In addition to views of central Bangkok, the Roof offers a dedicated personal martini sommelier and an extensive wine and champagne list.

Saxophone Pub & Restaurant LIVE MUSIC
(Map 60; www.saxophonepub.com; 3/8 Th Phayathai; ☎6pm-2am; BTS Victory Monument; ☎) This night-life staple is the big stage of Bangkok's live-music scene. It's a bit too loud for a first date, but the quality and variety of the music makes it a great destination for music-loving buddies on a night out.

Ad Here the 13th BAR, LIVE MUSIC
(Map p60; 13 Th Samsen; ☎6pm-midnight; river erry Th Phra Athit; ☎) Beside Khlong Banglamphu, Ad Here is everything a neighbourhood joint should be: lots of regulars, cold beer and heart-warming tunes delivered by a masterful house band starting at 10pm. Everyone knows each other, so don't be shy about mingling.

Tawandang German Brewery BAR, RESTAURANT
(cnr Th Phra Ram III & Th Narathiwat Ratchanakharin; BTS Chong Nonsi & access by taxi; ☎) It's Oktoberfest all year-round at this hangar-sized music hall, south of the city. The Thai-German food is tasty, the house-made brews

are entirely potable, and the nightly stage shows make singing along a necessity. Music starts at 8.30pm.

Brown Sugar PUB, LIVE MUSIC
(Map p90; 231/20 Th Sarasin; ☎6pm-midnight; BTS Ratchadamri; ☎) Plant yourself in a corner of this cosy, mazelike pub, and bump to Zao-za-dung, the nine-piece house band. The tables are so close that you can't help but make new friends.

Titanium LIVE MUSIC
(Map p92; 2/30 Soi 22, Th Sukhumvit; ☎8pm-1am; BTS Phrom Phong; ☎) Some come to this slightly cheesy 'ice bar' for the chill and the flavoured vodka, but we come for Unicorn, an all-female rock band.

Raintree PUB, LIVE MUSIC
(Map 60; 116/63-64 Soi Th Rang Nam; ☎6pm-1am; BTS Victory Monument; ☎) This atmospheric pub is one of the few remaining places in town to hear 'songs for life', Thai folk music with roots in the communist insurgency of the 1960s and '70s.

Bamboo Bar

HOTEL LOUNGE, JAZZ
(Map p80; ☎0 2236 0400; Oriental Hotel, 48 Soi 40/Oriental, Th Charoen Krung; ☀11am-1am; river ferry Tha Oriental; ☎) The Oriental's Bamboo Bar is famous for its live lounge jazz, which holds court inside a colonial-era cabin of lazy fans, broad-leafed palms and rattan decor.

Fat Gut'z

LIVE MUSIC
(Map p92; www.fatgutz.com; 264 Soi 12, Soi 55/Thong Lor, Th Sukhumvit; ☀6pm-2am; BTS Thong Lo; ☎) This closet-sized 'saloon' combines live music and, er, fish and chips. Despite (or perhaps thanks to) the odd whiff of chip oil, the odd combo works. Live blues every night from 9pm to midnight.

Rock Pub

PUB, LIVE MUSIC
(Map p86; www.therockpub-bangkok.com; 93/26-28 Th Phayathai; ☀9.30pm-2am; BTS Ratchathewi; ☎) If you thought the days of heavy metal were long gone, step back in time at this cave-like pub where posters of Iron Maiden pass for interior design and black jeans and long hair are the unofficial dress code.

Dance Clubs

Bangkok's discos are largely fly-by-night outfits, and that really fun club you found on your last trip two years ago is most likely history today. To find out what is going on, check **Dude Sweet** (www.dudesweet.org), organisers of hugely popular monthly parties, and **Bangkok Recorder** (www.bangkokrecorder.com) for rotating theme nights and visiting celeb DJs.

Other sources of info. include listings mag **BK** (http://bk.asia-city.com/nightlife), or if you're partial to the Th Sukhumvit scene, www.thonglor-ekamai.com has a good rundown of the area's clubs.

Cover charges for clubs and discos range from 100B to 600B and usually include a drink. Don't even think about showing up before 11pm, and always bring ID. Most clubs close at 2am. For places that open late, see p129.

RCA

DANCE CLUBS
(Royal City Avenue; off Th Phra Ram IX; MRT Phra Ram 9 & access by taxi) RCA is well and truly Club Alley. Formerly a bastion of the teen scene, this Vegas-like strip has finally graduated from high school and hosts partiers of every age. Worthwhile destinations include **808 Club** (www.808bangkok.com; admission from 300B), **Flix/Slim**, **Route 66** (www.

route66club.com; admission free) and **Cosmic Café** (admission free).

Tapas Room

DANCE CLUB
(Map p82; www.tapasroom.net; 114/17-18 Soi 4, Th Silom; admission 100B; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) You won't find food here, but the name is an accurate indicator of the Spanish/Moroccan-inspired vibe of this multilevel den. Come from Wednesday to Saturday when the combination of DJs and live percussion brings the body count to critical level.

Ekamai Soi 5

CLUB
(Map p92; cnr Soi Ekamai 5 & Soi 63/Ekamai, Th Sukhumvit; BTS Ekkamai & access by taxi) This open-air entertainment zone is the destination of choice for Bangkok's young and beautiful – for the moment at least. **Demo** (admission free), with blasting beats and a NYC warehouse vibe, is the epitome of the Alpha Club, while **Funky Villa** (admission free), with its outdoor seating and Top 40 soundtrack, boasts more of a chill-out vibe. Also accessible via Soi Thong Lor 10.

Glow

CLUB
(Map p92; www.glowbkk.com; 96/4-5 Soi 23, Th Sukhumvit; admission from 200B; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) Glow is a small venue with a big reputation. Boasting a huge variety of vodkas and a recently upgraded sound system, the tunes range from hip-hop to electronica and just about everything in between.

GÀ-TEU-I CABARET

Watching men dressed as women perform tacky show tunes has, not surprisingly, become the latest 'must-do' fixture on the Bangkok tourist circuit. Both **Calypso Cabaret** (Map p86; ☎0 2653 3960; www.calypsocabaret.com; Asia Hotel, 296 Th Phayathai; tickets 1200B; ☀show times 8.15pm & 9.45pm; BTS Ratchathewi) and **Mambo Cabaret** (☎0 2294 7381; www.mambocabaret.com; 59/28 Yannawa Tat Mai; tickets 800-1000B; ☀show times 7.15pm, 8.30pm & 10pm; BTS Chong Nonsi & access by taxi) host choreographed stage shows featuring Broadway high kicks and lip-synched pop tunes by the most well-endowed dudes you'll find anywhere. Mambo is located near Phra Ram III, in far southern Bangkok.

Nung-Len

(Map p92; www.nunglen.net; 217 Soi 63/Ekamai; admission free; BTS Ekkamai & access by taxi) Young, loud and Thai, Nung-Len (literally 'sit and chill') is a ridiculously popular sardine tin of live music and uni students on popular Th Ekamai. Make sure you get in before 10pm or you won't get in at all.

Bed Supperclub

(Map p92; www.bedsupperclub.com; 26 Soi 11, Th Sukhumvit; admission from 600B; BTS Nana) This illuminated tube has been a literal highlight of the Bangkok club scene for a good while now. Arrive early to squeeze in dinner (p124), or if you've only got dancing on your mind, come on Tuesday for the popular hip-hop nights.

Q Bar

(Map p92; www.qbarbangkok.com; 34 Soi 11, Th Sukhumvit; admission from 700B; BTS Nana) The club that introduced Bangkok to the lounge scene in 1999 is still alive and writhing. This darkened industrial space sees a revolving cast of somebodies, nobodies and working girls. Various theme nights fill the weekly calendar.

Club Culture

(Map p60; www.club-culture-bkk.com; admission from 200B; off Th Ratchadamnoen Klang; klong taxi Tha Phan Fah) Housed in a seemingly abandoned four-storey building, Club Culture is the quirkiest member of Bangkok's club scene. Opening dates and times can depend

on events, so check the website to see what's going on.

Traditional Arts Performances

As Thailand's cultural repository, Bangkok offers an array of dance and theatre performances. For background information about these ancient traditions, see p734 and p736.

Chalermkrung Royal Theatre

(Sala Chalerm Krung; Map p76; ☎0 2222 0434; www.salachalermkrung.com; cnr Th Charoen Krung & Th Triphet; tickets 800-1200B; ☺showtime 7.30pm; river ferry Tha Saphan Phut) In a Thai art deco building at the edge of the Chinatown-Phahurat district, this theatre provides a striking venue for *kōhn* (masked dance-drama based on stories from the *Ramakian*, the Thai version of the *Ramayana*). When it opened in 1933, the royally funded Chalermkrung was the largest and most modern theatre in Asia. Today, *kōhn* performances are held every Thursday and Friday and last about two hours plus intermission. The theatre requests that patrons dress respectfully, which means no shorts, tank tops or sandals.

Aksra Theatre

(Map 60; ☎0 2677 8888, ext 5730; www.aksratheatre.com; 3rd fl, King Power Complex, 8/1 Th Rang Nam; tickets 400-600B; ☺shows 7.30-8.30pm Mon-Wed,

CINEMA STRATEGY

Going to the movies is a big deal in Bangkok. Every mall has its own theatre and it's unlikely that any other city in the world has anything like EGV's Gold Class, a ticket that grants you entry into a cinema with fewer than 50 seats, and where you're plied with blankets, pillows, foot-warming stockings and, of course, a valet food-and-drink service. There's also Major Cineplex's Emperor Class seat, which for the price of a sticky stool back home entitles you to a sofa-like love seat designed for couples. And if you find Paragon Cineplex's 16 screens and 5000 seats a bit plebeian, you can always apply for Enigma, a members-only theatre.

For something a bit more intimate, try the old-skool stand-alone theatres at Siam Sq, including **Scala** (Map p86; ☎0 2251 2861; Siam Sq, Soi 1, Th Phra Ram I; BTS Siam) and **Lido** (Map p86; ☎0 2252 6498; Siam Sq, Th Phra Ram I; BTS Siam), or for something artsier, **RCA's House** (Map p92; ☎0 2641 5177; www.houserama.com; UMG Bldg, Royal City Ave, near Th Petch-aburi; MRT Phra Ram 9 & access by taxi) or Bangkok's **foreign cultural centres**; for contact details of the latter, see p144.

Nearly all movies in Thailand offer screenings with English subtitles – visit **Movie Seer** (www.movieseer.com) for show times. All films are preceded by the Thai royal anthem and everyone is expected to stand respectfully for its duration. And despite the heat and humidity on the streets, keep in mind that all of Bangkok's movie theatres pump the air-con with such vigour that a jumper is an absolute necessity – unless you're going Gold Class, that is.

dinner shows 6.30-7pm Thu-Sun; BTS Victory Monument) A variety of performances are now held at this modern theatre, but the highlight is performances of the *Ramakian* by using knee-high puppets that require three puppeteers to strike humanlike poses. Come early in the week for a performance in the Aksra Theatre, or later for a Thai buffet dinner coupled with a show.

National Theatre TRADITIONAL PERFORMANCE (Map p60; ☎ 2224 1352; 2 Th Rachini; tickets 60-100B; river ferry Tha Chang) After a lengthy renovation, the National Theatre is again open for business. Performances of *kōhn* are held on the first and second Sundays of the month, *lā-kon*, Thai dance-dramas, are held on the first Friday of the month, and Thai musical performances are held on the third Friday of the month.

Thai Boxing (Moo-ay tai)

Thai boxing's best of the best fight it out at Bangkok's two boxing stadiums: **Lumphini Stadium** (Sanam Muay Lumphini; Map p90; ☎ 2251 4303; Th Phra Ram IV; tickets 3rd/2nd class/ringside 1000/1500/2000B; MRT Lumphini) and **Ratchadamnoen Stadium** (Sanam Muay Ratchadamnoen; Map p60; ☎ 2281 4205; Th Ratchadamnoen Nok; tickets 3rd/2nd class/ringside 1000/1500/2000B; bus 70, 503, 509, klong taxi Tha Phan Fah). You'll note that tickets are not cheap, and these prices are exponentially more than what Thais pay. To add insult to injury, the inflated price offers no special service or seating, and at Ratchadamnoen Stadium foreigners are sometimes corralled into an area with an obstructed view. As long as you are mentally prepared for the financial jabs from the promoters, you'll be better prepared to enjoy the real fight.

Fights are held throughout the week, alternating between the two stadiums. Ratchadamnoen hosts the matches at 6.30pm on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday. Lumphini hosts matches at 6.30pm on Tuesday and Friday and Saturday at 5pm and 8.30pm. Aficionados say the best-matched bouts are reserved for Tuesday nights at Lumphini and Thursday nights at Ratchadamnoen. There is a total of eight to 10 fights of five rounds a piece. The stadiums don't usually fill up until the main events, which normally start around 8pm or 9pm.

There are English-speaking 'staff' standing outside the stadium who will practically tackle you upon arrival. Although there have been a few reports of scamming, most

of these assistants help steer visitors to the foreigner ticket windows and hand out a fight roster; they can also be helpful in telling you which fights are the best match-ups between contestants. (Some say that welterweights, between 135lb and 147lb - 61.2kg to 66.7kg, are the best.) To keep everyone honest, though, remember to purchase tickets from the ticket window, not from a person outside the stadium.

As a prematch warm-up, grab a plate of *gāi yāhng* (grilled chicken) and other north-eastern dishes from the restaurants surrounding the Ratchadamnoen Stadium.

Shopping

Welcome to a true buyer's market. Home to one of the world's largest outdoor markets, numerous giant upscale malls, and sidewalk-clogging bazaars on nearly every street, it's impossible not to be impressed by the amount of commerce in Bangkok. However, despite the apparent scope and variety, Bangkok really excels in one area when it comes to shopping: cheap stuff. The city is not the place to buy a new Nikon SLR or a (real) Fendi handbag - save those for online warehouses in the US or bargain-basement sales in Hong Kong. Ceramics, dirt-cheap T-shirts, fabric, Asian knick-knackery and yes, if you can deal with the guilt, pirated software and music - are the things for sale in Bangkok.

The difficulty is finding your way around, since the city's intense urban tangle sometimes makes orientation difficult. A good shopping companion is *Nancy Chandler's Map of Bangkok*, with annotations on all sorts of small and out-of-the-way shopping venues and *dà-làht* (markets).

Antiques

Real Thai antiques are rare and costly. Most Bangkok antique shops keep a few authentic pieces for collectors, along with lots of pseudo-antiques or traditionally crafted items that look like antiques.

River City

ANTIQUES MALL (Map p80; www.rivercity.co.th; Th Yotha, off Th Charoen Krung; ☎ 10am-10pm; river ferry Tha Si Phraya) Near the Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel, this multistorey shopping centre is an all-in-one stop for old-world Asiana. Several high-quality art and antique shops occupy the 3rd and 4th floors. Although the quality is high, the prices are too, as many wealthy tourists filter in and out. Many stores here close on Sunday.

House of Chao

(Map p82; 9/1 Th Decho; ☉9.30am-7pm; BTS Chong Nonsi) This three-storey shop, housed, appropriately, in an antique house, has everything necessary to deck out your fantasy colonial-era mansion. Particularly interesting are the various weatherworn doors, doorways, gateways and trellises behind the showroom.

Bookshops

For a decent selection of English-language books and magazines, branches of **Bookazine** (www.bookazine.co.th) and **B2S** (www.b2s.co.th) can be found at nearly every mall in central Bangkok. The Banglamphu area is home to nearly all of Bangkok's independent bookstores, and Th Khao San is virtually the only place in town to go for used English-language books. You're not going to find any deals there, but the selection is decent.

Asia Books (Map p92; www.asiabook.com; Soi 15, 221 Th Sukhumvit; ☉8am-9pm; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) Also a branch in the Emporium Shopping Centre (p136) and Siam Discovery Center (p136).

Book Lover (Map p60; Soi Rambuttri; ☉noon-10.30pm Tue-Sun; bus 2, 15, 44, 511, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Well-stocked used bookstore.

Dasa Book Café (Map p92; 710/4 Th Sukhumvit, btwn Soi 26 & 28; ☉10am-8pm; BTS Phrom Phong) Multilingual used bookstore.

Kinokuniya (www.kinokuniya.com) Siam Paragon (Map p86; 3rd fl, Th Phra Ram I; ☉10am-10pm; BTS Siam); Emporium (Map p92; 3rd fl, Th Sukhumvit; ☉10am-10pm; BTS Phrom Phong) The country's largest book store has two branches, both featuring multilingual selections, magazines and children's books.

Orchid Books (Map p82; www.orchidbooks.com; 4th fl, Silom Complex, 191 Th Silom; ☉11am-7pm Tue-Sun; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) Bangkok showroom of eponymous publishing house, with titles from other local imprints, with emphasis on Asian topics.

RimKhobFah Bookstore (Map p60; 78/1 Th Ratchadamnoen Klang; ☉10am-7pm; bus 2, 15, 44, 511, klong taxi to Tha Phan Fah) This shop has a brief collection of scholarly publications in English on Thai art and architecture.

Saraban (Map p60; 106/1 Th Rambuttri; ☉9.30am-10.30pm; bus 2, 15, 44, 511, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Large selection of international newspapers and Lonely Planet guides.

Shaman Bookstore Susie Walking Street (Map p60; Susie Walking St, off Th Khao San;

ANTIQUES

☉9am-11pm); Th Khao San (Map p60; Th Khao San; ☉9am-11pm) With two locations on Th Khao San, Shaman has the area's largest selection of used books.

Department Stores & Shopping Centres

Bangkok may be crowded and polluted, but its department stores are modern oases of order. They're also downright frigid, and Sunday afternoons see a significant part of Bangkok's population crowding into the city's indoor malls to escape the heat. By no accident, the BTS stations also have shaded walkways delivering passengers directly into nearby stores without ever having to set foot on ground level. Most shopping centres are open from 10am or 11am to 9pm or 10pm.

The selection is surprisingly good at Bangkok's shopping centres, but don't expect any bargains - most imported items cost more than they would elsewhere. Another quirk is that shop assistants follow you around the store from rack to rack. This is the definition of Thai 'service' rather than an indication that they've sniffed you out as a shoplifter. And be sure you're satisfied with an item, as returns are largely unheard of.

MBK Center

MALL

(Mahboonkrong; Map p86; www.mbk-center.co.th/en; cnr Th Phra Ram I & Th Phayathai; BTS National Stadium & Siam) This colossal mall has become a tourist destination in its own right. Swedish and other languages can be heard as much as Thai, and on any given weekend half of Bangkok can be found here combing through an inexhaustible range of small stalls and shops. This is the cheapest place to buy mobile phones and accessories (4th floor) and name-brand knock-offs (nearly every other floor). It's also one of the better places to stock up on camera gear (ground floor and 5th floor), and the expansive food court (6th floor) is one of the best in town.

Siam Center & Siam Discovery Center

MALL

(Map p86; cnr Th Phra Ram I & Th Phayathai; BTS National Stadium or Siam) These linked sister centres feel almost monastic in their hushed hallways compared to frenetic MBK, just across the street. Siam Discovery Center excels in home decor, with the whole 3rd floor devoted to Asian-minimalist styles and jewel-toned fabrics; we love the earthy, Thai-influenced designs at **Doi Tung**. The

MARKETING STRATEGY

Bangkok's shopping options can be a bit overwhelming. So to help you burn your baht more efficiently, we've put together a brief cheat sheet.

Malls

- » **Gaysorn Plaza** (p137) Great for upscale handicrafts and souvenirs.
- » **Siam Center** (p136) A goldmine of local fashion labels.
- » **MBK Center** (p136) Cheap mobile phones and other electronics.
- » **Pantip Plaza** (p137) Several floors of computer gear.
- » **Siam Paragon** (p137) Luxury labels, from Lamborghini to Fendi.
- » **Siam Discovery Center** (p136) Funky home furnishings.

Markets

- » **Chatuchak Weekend Market** (p140) Souvenirs or a vintage tracksuit – they're all here.
- » **Nonthaburi Market** (p142) The most picturesque fresh market in the area, but get there early – ideally before 7am.
- » **Pak Khlong Market** (p142) Show up late-late for the visual poetry that is the nightly flower market.
- » **Pratunam Market** (p142) Acres of cheap togs, much of it for less than you'd pay for a pair of socks at home.
- » **Talat Rot Fai** (p142) Bangkok's version of the *Antiques Road Show*.

attached Siam Center, Thailand's first shopping centre built in 1976, has recently gone under the redesign knife for a younger, hipper look. Youth fashion is its new focus, and several local labels, ranging from **anr** to **senada***, can be found on the 2nd floor.

Siam Paragon

MALL

(Map p86; Th Phra Ram I; BTS Siam) The biggest and glitziest of Bangkok's shopping malls, Siam Paragon is more of an urban park than shopping centre. Astronomically luxe brands occupy most floors, while the majority of shoppers hang out in the reflecting pool atrium or basement-level food court. The 3rd floor is home to **Kinokuniya**, Thailand's largest English-language bookstore.

Gaysorn Plaza

MALL

(Map p86; cnr Th Phloenchit & Th Ratchadamri; BTS Chit Lom) A haute couture catwalk, Gaysorn's spiralling staircases and all-white halls preserve all of fashion's beloved designers in museum-curatorship style. Local fashion leaders occupy the 2nd floor 'Thai Fashion Chic', while the top floor is a stroll through home decor; highlights of which are the eclectic **D&O Shop**, the fragrant soaps at **Thann** and the Asian-influenced ceramics at **Lamont**.

Central World Plaza

MALL

(Map p86; cnr Th Ratchadamri & Th Phra Ram I; BTS Chit Lom). Bangkok's hippest mall suffered greatly during the unrest of April 2010, but the vast majority of shops are open again and **Zen** department store was being rebuilt at research time. There's an extrahuge branch of bookstore **B2S**, and you could spend an hour sniffing around the fragrances at **Karmakamet**.

Emporium

SHOPPING CENTRE

(Map p92; 622 Th Sukhumvit, cnr Soi 24; BTS Phrom Phong; ☺10am-10pm) You might not have access to the beautiful people's nightlife scene, but you can observe their spending rituals at this temple to red hot and classic cool. For something cheekily local, check out **Propaganda**, home to Mr P, brainchild of Thai designer Chaiyut Plypetch, and who appears in anatomically correct cartoon lamps and other products.

Pantip Plaza

IT MALL

(Map p86; 604 Th Petchaburi; BTS Ratchathewi) North of Siam Sq, this place is five storeys of computer and software stores ranging from legit to flea market. Many locals come here to buy 'pirated' software and computer peripherals, but the crowds and touts ('DVD sex?') make it among the more tiring shopping experiences in town.

BARGAINING 101

Many of your purchases in Bangkok will involve an ancient skill that has long been abandoned in the West: bargaining. Contrary to what you'll see on a daily basis on Th Khao San, bargaining (in Thai, *dòr rahkah*) is not a terse exchange of numbers and animosity. Rather, bargaining Thai style is a generally friendly transaction where two people try to agree on a price that is fair to both of them.

The first rule of bargaining is to have a general idea of the price. Ask around at a few vendors to get a rough notion. When you're ready to buy, it's generally a good strategy to start at 50% of the asking price and work up from there. If you're buying several of an item, you have much more leverage to request and receive a lower price. If the seller immediately agrees to your first price you're probably paying too much, but it's bad form to bargain further at this point. In general, keeping a friendly, flexible demeanour throughout the transaction will almost always work in your favour. And remember, only begin bargaining if you're really planning on buying the item. Most importantly, there's simply no point in getting angry or upset over a few baht. The locals, who inevitably have less money than you, never do this.

Central Chit Lom

DEPARTMENT STORE

(Map p86; www.central.co.th; 1027 Th Ploenchit; BTS Chit Lom) Generally regarded as the all-round best for quality and selection, Central has 13 branches in Bangkok in addition to this chichi flagship.

Fashion & Textiles

In recent years Bangkok has become something of a fashion-conscious and, increasingly, fashion-generating city. Local designers such as senada*, Flynow and Tango have shown that the city harbours a style scene that can compete on the international catwalk. More affordable looks are exhibited by the city's trendy teens who strut their distinctive 'Bangkok' look in the various shopping areas.

Siam Square

OPEN-AIR MALL

(Map p86; btwn Th Phra Ram I & Th Phayathai, BTS Siam) This low-slung commercial universe is a network of some 12 soi lined with trendy, fly-by-night boutiques, many of which are the first ventures of young designers. It's a great place to pick up designs you're guaranteed not to find anywhere else, not to mention the best place for urban naturalists to observe Bangkok teens in their natural habitat.

It's Happened to be a Closet

WOMEN'S FASHION

(Map p86; 1st fl, Siam Paragon, Th Phra Ram I; BTS Siam) Garbled grammar aside, this is a brilliant place to stock up on locally designed and made togs – think Th Khao San meets Siam Paragon. Also available at Emporium and Siam Square.

Flynow

WOMEN'S FASHION

(Map p86; www.flynowbangkok.com; 2nd fl, Gaysorn Plaza, cnr Th Ploenchit & Th Ratchadamri; BTS Chit Lom) A longstanding leader in Bangkok's home-grown fashion scene, Flynow creates feminine couture that has caught the eyes of several international shows. There are branches at Siam Center and Central World Plaza.

Tango

LEATHER GOODS

(Map p86; www.tango.co.th; 2nd fl, Gaysorn Plaza, cnr Th Ploenchit & Th Ratchadamri; BTS Chit Lom) This home-grown brand specialises in funky leather goods, but you may not even recognise the medium under the layers of bright embroidery and chunky jewels. Also available at Siam Center.

Jim Thompson

SILK

(Map p82; www.jimthompson.com; 9 Th Surawong; ☎9am-9pm; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) The surviving business of the international promoter of Thai silk, this, the largest Jim Thompson shop, sells colourful silk handkerchiefs, placemats, wraps and pillow cushions. Just up the road is the company's **factory outlet** (Map p82; 149/4-6 Th Surawong; ☎9am-6pm) that sells discontinued patterns at a significant discount.

Handicrafts & Decor

The tourist markets have tons of factory-made pieces that pop up all along the tourist route. The shopping centres sell products with a little better quality at proportionally higher prices, but the independent shops sell the best items all round.

A bi-monthly **Thai Craft Fair** (Map p92; www.thaicraft.org; 3rd fl, Jasmine City Building, Soi 23, Th Sukhumvit; ☎9am-6pm; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) is held in Bangkok, featuring the wares of more than 60 Thai artisans.

Thai Home Industries

HANDICRAFTS

(Map p80; 35 Soi 40/Oriental, Th Charoen Krung; ☎9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat; river ferry Tha Oriental) A visit to this temple-like building, a former monks' quarters, is like discovering an abandoned attic of Asian booty. Despite the odd assortment of items (our last visit revealed items ranging from elegant handmade flatware to wooden model ships) and lack of order, it's heaps more fun than the typically faceless Bangkok handicraft shop.

Nandakwang

HANDICRAFTS

(Map p92; 108/2-3 Soi 23, Th Sukhumvit; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Sat & 10am-5pm Sun; BTS Asok, MRT Sukhumvit) A Bangkok satellite of a Chiang Mai-based store, Nandakwang sells a fun and handsome mix of cloth, wood and glass products. The cheery hand-embroidered pillows and bags are particularly attractive. There is also a branch on the 4th floor of Siam Discovery Center.

Sop Moei Arts

HANDICRAFTS

(Map p92; www.sopmoeiarts.com; Soi 49/9, Th Sukhumvit; ☎9.30am-5pm Sun-Fri; BTS Phrom Phong & access by taxi) The Bangkok showroom of

this nonprofit organisation features the vibrant cloth creations of Karen weavers in Mae Hong Son, northern Thailand. It's located near the end of Soi 49/9, in the large Racquet Club complex.

Taekee Taekon

HANDICRAFTS

(Map p60; 118 Th Phra Athit; ☎9am-6pm Mon-Sat; bus 32, 33, 64, 82, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) Representing Thailand's main silk-producing regions, this charming store has a beautiful selection of table runners and wall hangings. Alongside silk products, you will also find small examples of celadon pottery and a terrific selection of postcards.

Narai Phand

HANDICRAFTS

(Map p86; www.naraiphand.com; ground fl, President Tower, 973 Th Phloenchit; ☎10am-8pm; BTS Phloen Chit) Souvenir-quality handicrafts are given fixed prices and comfortable air-con at this government-run facility. You won't find anything here that you haven't already seen at all of the tourist street markets, but it is a good stop if you're pressed for time or spooked by haggling.

Markets

Although air-conditioned malls have better PR departments, open-air markets are the true face of commercial Bangkok, and are where you'll find the best bargains.

7-ELEVEN FOREVER

Be extremely wary of any appointment that involves the words 'meet me at 7-Eleven'. According to the company's website there are 3912 branches of 7-Eleven in Thailand alone (there will inevitably be several more by the time this book has gone to print) – more than half the number found in the entire USA. In Bangkok, 7-Elevens are so ubiquitous that it's not uncommon to see two branches staring at each other from across the street.

The first *sewên* (as it's known in Thai) in Thailand was installed in Patpong in 1991. The brand caught on almost immediately and today Thailand ranks behind only Japan and Taiwan in the total number of branches in Asia. The stores are either owned directly by the company or are franchises, owned and managed by private individuals.

Although the company claims that its stores carry more than 2000 items, the fresh flavours of Thai cuisine are not reflected in the wares of a typical Bangkok 7-Eleven, whose food selections are even junkier than those of its counterparts in the West. Like all shops in Thailand, alcohol is only available from 11am to 2pm and 5pm to 11pm, and branches of 7-Eleven located near hospitals, temples and schools do not sell alcohol or cigarettes at all (but do continue to sell unhealthy snack food).

We love 7-Eleven for the wide selection of drinks, a godsend in sweltering Bangkok. You can conveniently pay most of your bills at the Service Counter, and all manner of phone cards, prophylactics and 'literature' (although, oddly, not most newspapers) are also available. And sometimes the blast of air-conditioning alone is enough reason to stop by. But our single favourite 7-Eleven item must be the dirt-cheap chilled scented towels for wiping away the accumulated grime and sweat before your next appointment.

ALL-PURPOSE MARKETS

Chatuchak Weekend Market

MARKET

(Talat Nat Jatujak; location on Map p118, plan of market p141; ☀9am-6pm Sat & Sun; BTS Mo Chit, MRT Chatuchak Park & Kamphaeng Phet) Among the largest markets in the world, Chatuchak seems to unite everything buyable, from used vintage sneakers to baby squirrels. Plan to spend a full day, as there's plenty to see, do and buy. But come early, ideally around 9am to 10am, to beat the crowds and the heat.

There is an information centre and a bank with **ATMs** and **foreign-exchange booths** at the **Chatuchak Park offices**, near the northern end of the market's Soi 1, Soi 2 and Soi 3. Schematic maps and toilets are located throughout the market.

There are a few vendors on weekday mornings, and a daily vegetable, plant and flower market opposite the market's southern side. One section of the latter, known as the **Or Tor Kor Market** (Map p118; Th Kamphaeng Phet; ☀8am-6pm; MRT Kamphaeng Phet 1), sells fantastically gargantuan fruit and seafood, and has a decent food court as well.

Once you're deep in the bowels of Chatuchak, it will seem like there is no order and no escape, but the market is arranged into relatively coherent sections. Use the clocktower as a handy landmark.

Antiques, Handicrafts & Souvenirs

Section 1 is the place to go for Buddha statues, old LPs and other random antiques. More secular arts and crafts, such as musical instruments and hill-tribe items can be found in Sections 25 and 26. **Baan Sin Thai** (Map p141; Section 24, Stall 130, Soi 1) sells a mixture of *kōhn* masks and old-school Thai toys, all of which make fun souvenirs, and **Kitcharoen Dountri** (Map p141; Section 8, Stall 464, Soi 15) specialises in Thai musical instruments, including flutes, whistles, drums and CDs of classical Thai music.

Other quirky gifts include the life-like plastic Thai fruit and vegetables at **Marché** (Map p141; Section 17, Stall 254, Soi 1), or their scaled-down miniature counterparts nearby at **Papachu** (Map p141; Section 17, Stall 23, Soi 1).

Clothing & Accessories

Clothing dominates most of Chatuchak, starting in Section 8 and continuing through the even-numbered sections to 24. Sections 5 and 6 deal in used clothing for every Thai youth subculture, from punks to cowboys, while Soi 7, where it transects Sections 12

and 14 is heavy on the more underground hip-hop and skate fashions. Tourist-sized clothes and textiles are found in sections 10 and 8.

For accessories, several shops in Sections 24 and 26, such as **Orange Karen Silver** (Map p141; Section 26, Stall 246, Soi 8) specialise in chunky silver jewellery and semiprecious uncut stones.

Eating & Drinking

Lots of Thai-style eating and snacking will stave off Chatuchak rage (cranky behaviour brought on by dehydration or hunger), and numerous food stalls set up shop between Sections 6 and 8. Longstanding standouts include **Foon Talop** (Map p141; Section 26, Stall 319, Soi 8), an incredibly popular Isan restaurant, **Café Ice** (Map p141; Section 7, Stall 267, Soi 3), a Western-Thai fusion joint that does good *pāt tai* and tasty fruit shakes, and **Saman Islam** (Map p141; Section 16, Stall 34, Soi 24), a Thai-Muslim restaurant that serves a tasty chicken biryani.

If you need air-con, pop into **Toh-Blue** (Map p141; Th Kamphaengphet 2; ☀11am-8pm; MRT Kamphaeng Phet; ☎) for all the Thai standards. And as evening draws near, down a beer at **Viva's** (Map p141; Section 26, Stall 149, Soi 6), a cafe-bar that features live music or, if it's dark, cross to Th Kamphaeng Phet 2 to the cozy whisky bars near Fake Club (p130).

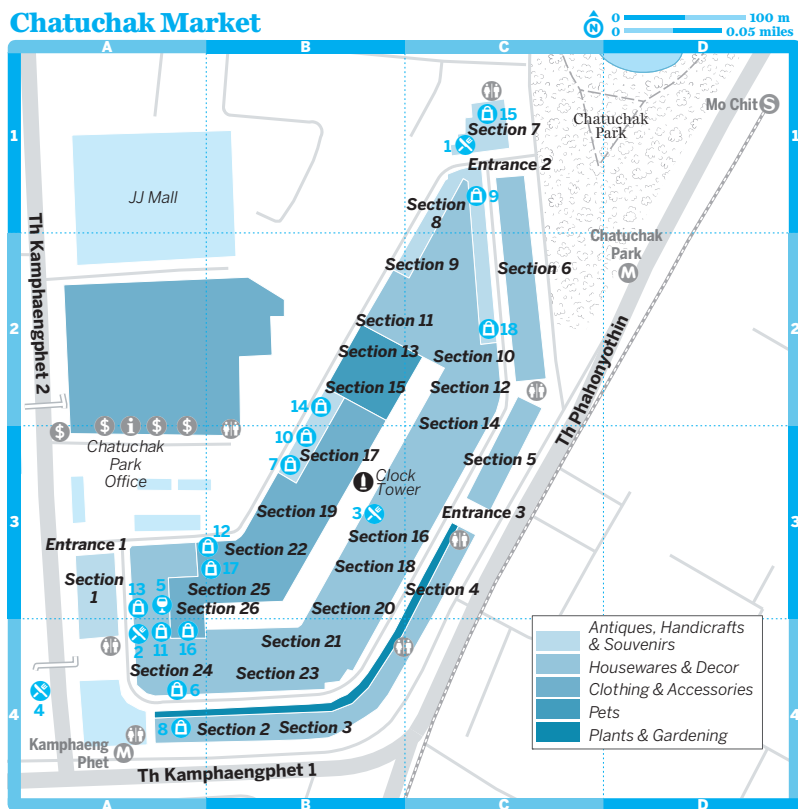
Housewares & Decor

The northern and northwestern edge of the market, particularly sections 8 to 26, specialises in all manner of housewares, from cheap plastic buckets to expensive brass woks. This area is a particularly good place to stock up on inexpensive Thai ceramics, ranging from celadon to the traditional rooster-themed bowls from Lampang.

N & D Tablewares (Map p141; Section 25, Stall 185, Soi 4) has a huge variety of stainless-steel flatware, and **Tan-Ta-Nod** (Map p141; Section 22, Stall 061, Soi 5) deals in coconut and sugar palm-derived plates, bowls and other utensils.

Those looking to spice up the house should stop by **Spice Boom** (Map p141; Section 26, Stall 246, Soi 8), where you can find dried herbs and spices for both consumption and decoration. Other notable olfactory indulgences include the hand-made soaps, lotions, salts and scrubs at **D-narn** (Map p141; Section 19, Stall 204, Soi 1) and the fragrant perfumes and essential oils at **Karmakamet** (Map p141; Section 2, Soi 3).

Chatuchak Market



Chatuchak Market

☒ Eating

- 1 Café Ice C1
- 2 Foon Talop A4
- 3 Saman Islam B3
- 4 Toh-Plue A4

☕ Drinking

- 5 Viva's A3

🛒 Shopping

- 6 Baan Sin Thai A4
- 7 D-narn B3

- 8 Karmakamet A4
- 9 Kitcharoen Dountri C1
- 10 Marché B3
- 11 Meng A4
- 12 N & D Tablewares B3
- 13 Orange Karen Silver A3
- 14 Papachu B2
- 15 Pariwat A-nantachina C1
- 16 Spice Boom A4
- 17 Tan-Ta-Nod B3
- 18 Tuptim Shop C2

For less utilitarian goods, Section 7 is a virtual open-air gallery – we particularly liked **Pariwat A-nantachina's** (Map p141; Section 7, Stall 118, Soi 2) for Bangkok-themed murals. Several shops in Section 10, including **Tuptim Shop** (Map p141; Section 10, Shop

261, Soi 19) sell new and antique Burmese lacquer ware. **Meng** (Map p141; Section 26, Stall 195, Soi 8) features a dusty mish-mash of quirky antiques from both Thailand and Burma.

THE WAR ON THE GEM SCAM

We're begging you, if you aren't a gem trader, then don't buy unset stones in Thailand – period. Countless tourists are sucked into the prolific and well-rehearsed gem scam in which they are taken to a store by a helpful stranger and tricked into buying bulk gems that can supposedly be resold in their home country for 100% profit. The expert con artists (part of a well-organised cartel) seem trustworthy and convince tourists that they need a citizen of the country to circumvent tricky customs regulations. Guess what, the gem world doesn't work like that; and what most tourists end up with are worthless pieces of glass. By the time you sort all this out, the store has closed, changed names and the police can do little to help.

Want to know more or want to report a scam? Visit www.2bangkok.com and navigate down to the 'Gem Scam' page for five years' worth of tracking the phenomenon, or go to [Thai Gems Scam Group](http://ThaiGemsScamGroup.com) (www.geocities.com/thaigemscamgroup) for photos of touts who troll the temples for victims. The tourist police can also help to resolve some purchase disputes, but don't expect miracles.

Pets

Possibly the most fun you'll ever have window shopping will be petting puppies and cuddling kittens in sections 13 and 15. Soi 9 of the former features several shops that deal solely in clothing for pets. It's also worth noting that this section is infamous for selling illegal wildlife, mainly rare and protected species of reptiles and amphibians, in addition to more exotic creatures such as monkeys and what not. We discourage making any such purchases.

Plants & Gardening

The interior perimeter of sections 2 to 4 feature a huge variety of potted plants, flowers, herbs, fruits, and the accessories needed to maintain them. Many of these shops are also open on weekday afternoons.

Pak Khleng Market

MARKET

(Flower Market; Map p76; Th Chakkaphet & Th Atsadam; ☀24hr; river ferry Tha Saphan Phut) Every night this market near the Chao Phraya river becomes the city's largest depot for wholesale flowers. Arrive as late as you're willing to stay up, and be sure to take a camera, as the technicolour blur of roses, lotuses and daisies on the move is a sight to behold. During the day, Pak Khleng is a wholesale vegetable market.

Talat Rot Fai

MARKET

(Map p118; Th Kamphaeng Phet; ☀6pm-midnight Sat & Sun; MRT Kamphaeng Phet) Set in a sprawling abandoned rail yard, this market is all about the retro, from antique enamel platters to secondhand Vespas. With mobile snack vendors, VW van-based bars and even

a few land-bound pubs, it's also much more than just a shopping destination.

Nonthaburi Market

MARKET

(Map p56; Tha Nam Non, Nonthaburi; ☀5am-8am; river ferry Tha Nonthaburi) Located a short walk from Nonthaburi Pier, the northernmost extent of the Chao Phraya Express boats, this is one of the most expansive and atmospheric produce markets in the area. Come early, as most vendors are gone by 9am.

Pratunam Market

MARKET

(Map p86; cnr Th Petchaburi & Th Ratchaprarop; ☀10am-9pm; klong taxi to Tha Pratunam) The city's biggest wholesale clothing market, Pratunam is a tight warren of stalls trickling deep into the block. In addition to cheap T-shirts and jeans, luggage, bulk toiletries and souvenirs are also available.

Soi Lalai Sap

STREET MARKET

(Map p82; Soi 5/Lalai Sap, Th Silom; ☀8am-6pm; BTS Chong Nonsi) The 'money-melting' street has a number of vendors selling all sorts of cheap clothing, watches and homewares during the day. Regular perusers say that imperfections from name-brand factories often appear in the stacks.

Sampeng Lane

MARKET

(Map p76; Soi Wanit 1/Sampeng Lane; river ferry Tha Ratchawong) This wholesale market runs roughly parallel to Th Yaowarat, bisecting the two districts of Chinatown and Phahurat. Pick up the narrow artery from Th Ratchawong and follow it through its many manifestations – from handbags, homewares, hair decorations, stickers, Japanese-animation gear, plastic beeping key chains.

TOURIST MARKETS

The souvenir sellers have an amazing knack for sniffing out what new arrivals want to haul back home – perennial favourites include raunchy T-shirts, *mörn kwāhn* (traditional Thai wedge-shaped pillow), CDs and synthetic sarongs.

Th Khao San Market

STREET MARKET

(Map p60; Th Khao San; ☉11am-11pm; bus 2, 15, 44, 511, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) The main guest house strip in Banglamphu is a day-and-night shopping bazaar for serious baht pinchers,

with cheap T-shirts, ‘bootleg’ CDs, wooden elephants, hemp clothing, fisherman pants and other goods that make backpackers go ga-ga.

Th Sukhumvit Market

STREET MARKET

(Map p92; Th Sukhumvit btwn Soi 2 & 12, 3 & 15; ☉11am-11pm; BTS Nana) Knock-off bags and watches, stacks of skin-flick DVDs, Chinese throwing stars and other questionable gifts for your high-school-aged brother dominate at this market peddling to package and sex tourists.

ONE NIGHT IN BANGKOK... IS NOT ENOUGH TO HAVE A SUIT MADE

Many tourists arrive in Bangkok with the notion of getting clothes custom-tailored at a bargain price. Which is entirely possible. Prices are almost always lower than what you'd pay at home, but common scams ranging from commission-hungry túk-túk drivers to shoddy workmanship and inferior fabrics make bespoke tailoring in Bangkok a potentially disappointing investment. To maximise your chances of walking away feeling (and looking) good, read on...

The golden rule of custom tailoring is that you get what you pay for. If you sign up for a suit, two pants, two shirts and a tie, with silk sarong thrown in for US\$169 (a very popular offer in Bangkok), the chances are it will look and fit like a sub-US\$200 wardrobe. Although an offer may seem great on the surface, the price may fluctuate significantly depending on the fabric you choose. Supplying your own fabric won't necessarily reduce the price by much, but it should ensure you get exactly the look you're after. If it's silk you fancy, go straight to the Jim Thompson outlet (p138) for quality at good prices.

Have a good idea of what you want before walking into a shop. If it's a suit you're after, should it be single- or double-breasted? How many buttons? What style trousers? Of course, if you have no idea then the tailor will be more than happy to advise. Alternatively, bring a favourite garment from home and have it copied.

Set aside a week to get clothes tailored. Shirts and trousers can often be turned around in 48 hours or less with only one fitting, but no matter what a tailor may tell you, it takes more than one and often more than two fittings to create a good suit. Most reliable tailors will ask for two to five sittings. Any tailor that can sew your order in less than 24 hours should be treated with caution.

Reputable tailors include:

» **Pinky Tailors**

TAILOR

(Map p86; 888/40 Mahatun Plaza Arcade, Th Ploenchit; ☉10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat; BTS Phloen Chit) Custom-made suit jackets have been Mr Pinky's speciality for more than 35 years. Located behind the Mahatun Building.

» **Marco Tailors**

TAILOR

(Map p86; 430/33 Soi 7, Siam Sq; ☉9am-7pm Mon-Sat; BTS Siam) Dealing solely in men's suits, this longstanding and reliable tailor has a wide selection of banker-sensibility wools and cottons.

» **Raja's Fashions**

TAILOR

(Map p92; 1/6 Soi 4, Th Sukhumvit; ☉10.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat; BTS Nana) One of Bangkok's more famous tailors, Raja's gets a mixed bag of reviews, but the majority swear by the service and quality.

» **Nickermann's**

TAILOR

(Map p92; www.nickermanns.net; basement, Landmark Hotel, 138 Th Sukhumvit; ☉10am-9pm; BTS Nana) Corporate ladies rave about Nickermann's tailor-made power suits: pants and jackets that suit curves and busts. Formal ball gowns are another area of expertise.

Patpong Night Market

STREET MARKET

(Map p82; Patpong Soi 1 & 2, Th Silom; ☎7pm-1am; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom) Drawing more crowds than the ping-pong shows, this market continues the street's illicit leanings with a deluge of cheap and pirated goods, particularly watches and clothing. Bargain with intensity as first-quoted prices tend to be astronomically high.

i Information**Dangers & Annoyances**

You are more likely to be charmed rather than coerced out of your money in Bangkok. Practised con artists capitalise on Thailand's famous friendliness and a revolving door of clueless tourists. Bangkok's most heavily toured areas – Wat Phra Kaew, Wat Pho, Jim Thompson House, Th Khao San, Erawan Shrine – are favourite hunting grounds for these scallywags. The best prevention is knowledge, so before hitting the ground, become familiar with the more common local scams listed in the boxed text below.

If you've been scammed, the tourist police can be effective in dealing with some of the 'unethical' business practices and crime. But in general you should enter into every monetary transac-

tion with the understanding that you have no consumer protection or recourse.

Cultural Centres

Various international cultural centres in Bangkok organise film festivals, lectures, language classes and other educational liaisons.

Alliance Française (Map p90; ☎0 2670 4200; www.alliance-francaise.or.th; 29 Th Sathon Tai; MRT Lumpini) Leafy compound includes a **library** (☎10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5.30pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun), **bookshop** (☎9am-7pm Mon-Sat) and **Café 1912** (p127).

British Council (Map p86; ☎0 2657 5678; www.britishcouncil.or.th; 254 Soi Chulalongkorn 64, Th Phra Ram I; ☎8.30am-7pm; BTS Siam)

Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand (FCCT; Map p86; ☎0 2652 0580; www.fccthai.com; Penthouse, Maneeya Center, 518/5 Th Ploenchit; BTS Chit Lom)

Goethe Institut (Map p90; ☎0 2287 0942; www.goethe.de; 18/1 Soi Goethe, btwn Th Sathon Tai & Soi Ngam Duphli; ☎9.30am-6pm Tues-Thurs, 9.30am-3pm Wed, 8am-1pm Sat & Sun; MRT Lumpini)

Emergency

If you have a medical emergency and need an ambulance, contact the English-speaking hos-

COMMON BANGKOK SCAMS

Commit these classic rip-offs to memory and join us in our ongoing crusade to outsmart Bangkok's crafty scam artists. For details on the famous gem scam, see the boxed text, p142.

- » **Closed today** Ignore any 'friendly' local who tells you that an attraction is closed for a Buddhist holiday or for cleaning. These are set-ups for trips to a bogus gem sale.
- » **Túk-túk rides for 10B** Say goodbye to your day's itinerary if you climb aboard this ubiquitous scam. These alleged 'tours' bypass all the sights and instead cruise to all the fly-by-night gem and tailor shops that pay commissions.
- » **Flat-fare taxi ride** Flatly refuse any driver who quotes a flat fare (usually between 100B and 150B for in-town destinations), which will usually be three times more expensive than the reasonable meter rate. Walking beyond the tourist area will usually help in finding an honest driver. If the driver has 'forgotten' to put the meter on, just say, 'Meter, *kâ/kráp*' (for female/male).
- » **Tourist buses to the south** On the long journey south, well-organised and connected thieves have hours to comb through your bags, breaking into (and later resealing) locked bags, searching through hiding places and stealing credit cards, electronics and even toiletries. This scam has been running for years but is easy to avoid simply by carrying valuables with you on the bus.
- » **Friendly strangers** Be wary of smartly dressed men who approach you asking where you're from and where you're going. Their opening gambit is usually followed with: 'Ah, my son/daughter is studying at university in (your city)' – they seem to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of major universities. As the tourist authorities here pointed out, this sort of behaviour is out of character for Thais and should be treated with suspicion.

pitals listed below. In case of a police or safety issue, contact the following emergency services:

Fire (☎199)

Police/Emergency (☎191)

Tourist police (☎1155; 🕒24hr) An English-speaking unit that investigates criminal activity involving tourists, including gem scams. It can also act as a bilingual liaison with the regular police.

Internet & Telephone Access

There's no shortage of internet cafes in Bangkok competing to offer the cheapest and fastest connection. Rates vary depending on the concentration and affluence of net-heads – Banglamphu is cheaper than Sukhumvit or Silom, with rates as low as 20B per hour. Many internet shops are adding Skype and headsets to their machines so that international calls can be made for the price of surfing the web.

A convenient place to take care of your communication needs in the centre of Bangkok is the **TrueMove Shop** (Soi 2, Siam Sq; 🕒7am-10pm; BTS Siam). It has high-speed internet computers equipped with Skype, sells phones and mobile subscriptions, and can also provide information on city-wide wi-fi access for computers and phones.

Wi-fi, provided mostly free of charge, is becoming more and more ubiquitous around Bangkok and is available at more businesses and public hot spots than we have space to list here. For relatively authoritative lists of wi-fi hot spots in Bangkok, go to www.bkkpages.com (under 'Bangkok Directory') or www.stickmanweekly.com/WiFi/BangkokFreeWirelessInternetWiFi.htm.

Media

Daily newspapers are available at streetside newsagents. Monthly magazines are available in most bookstores.

Bangkok 101 (www.bangkok101.com) A monthly city primer with photo essays and reviews of sights, restaurants and entertainment.

Bangkok Post (www.bangkokpost.net) The leading English-language daily with Friday and weekend supplements covering city events.

BK (<http://bk.asia-city.com>) Free weekly listings mag for the young and hip.

CNNGo (www.cngo/bangkok) The Bangkok pages of this online listings mag are a good source for the lowdown on restaurants and events.

The Nation (www.nationmultimedia.com) English-language daily with a heavy focus on business.

Medical Services

Thanks to its high standard of hospital care, Bangkok is fast becoming a destination for medical tourists shopping for more affordable

dental check-ups, elective surgery and cosmetic procedures. Pharmacists (chemists) throughout the city can diagnose and treat most minor ailments (Bangkok belly, sinus and skin infections etc). The following hospitals offer 24-hour emergency services, and the numbers below should be contacted if you need an ambulance or immediate medical attention. Most of these hospitals also have daily clinics with English-speaking staff.

Bangkok Christian Hospital (Map p82; ☎0 2235 1000; www.bkkchristianhosp.th.com; 124 Th Silom; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom)

BNH (Map p82; ☎0 2686 2700; www.bnghospital.com; 9 Th Convent, off Th Silom; BTS Sala Daeng, MRT Si Lom)

Bumrungrad Hospital (Map p92; ☎0 2667 1000; www.bumrungrad.com; 33 Soi 3/Nana Neua, Th Sukhumvit; BTS Phloen Chit)

Samitivej Hospital (Map p92; ☎0 2711 8000; www.samitivejhospitals.com; 133 Soi 49, Th Sukhumvit; BTS Phrom Phong & access by taxi)

St Louis Hospital (Map p82; ☎0 2210 9999; www.saintlouis.or.th; 215 Th Sathon Tai; BTS Surasak)

Money

Regular bank hours in Bangkok are generally 8.30am to 3.30pm, although branches in busy areas and shopping malls are open later. ATMs are common in all areas of the city. Many Thai banks also have currency-exchange bureaus; there are also exchange desks within eyeshot of most tourist areas. Go to 7-Eleven shops or other reputable places to break 1000B bills; don't expect a vendor or taxi to be able to change a bill 500B or larger.

Post

Main post office (Map p80; Th Charoen Krung; 🕒8am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat & Sun; river ferry Tha Si Phraya) Near Soi 35, services include poste restante and packaging within the main building. Branch post offices throughout the city also offer poste restante and parcel services.

Toilets

Public toilets in Bangkok are few and far between and your best bet is to head for a shopping centre, fast-food restaurant, or our favourite, a luxury hotel. Shopping centres might charge 2B to 5B for a visit; some newer shopping centres have toilets for the disabled. Despite what you'll hear, squat toilets are a dying breed in Bangkok.

Tourist Information

Official tourist offices distribute maps, brochures and advice on sights and activities. Don't confuse these free services with the licensed travel agents that book tours and transport

THE INSIDE SCOOP

Several Bangkok residents, both local and foreign, have taken their experiences to the 'small screen' and maintain blogs and websites about living in Bangkok. Some of the more informative or entertaining include:

- » **2Bangkok** (www.2bangkok.com) News sleuth and history buff follows the city headlines from today and yesterday.
- » **Austin Bush Food Blog** (www.austinbushphotography.com/category/foodblog) Written by the author of this chapter, the blog focuses on food culture and eating in Bangkok and elsewhere.
- » **Global Post** (www.globalpost.com/bio/patrick-winn/articles) Patrick Winn, this online news agency's Southeast Asia Correspondent, is based in Bangkok and has a knack for uncovering all the wacky things that go on there.
- » **Greg To Differ** (www.gregtodiffer.com) 'Stories, rants and observations on expat life in Asia's craziest city.' Also has an accompanying podcast.
- » **Newley Purnell** (www.newley.com) This Bangkok-based US freelance writer comments on everything from local politics to his profound love of *pàt gà-prow* (a type of spicy stir-fry).
- » **Not The Nation** (www.notthenation.com) Thailand's answer to *The Onion*.
- » **Stickman** (www.stickmanbangkok.com) Formerly associated with naughty Bangkok nightlife, the 'new' Stickman is a more general blog about life, work and love in Bangkok.

on a commission basis. Often, travel agencies incorporate elements of the official national tourism organisation name (Tourism Authority of Thailand; TAT) into their own to purposefully confuse tourists.

Bangkok Information Center (Map p60; ☎0 2225 7612-4; www.bangkoktourist.com; 17/1 Th Phra Athit; ☀8am-7pm Mon-Fri & 9am-5pm Sat & Sun; bus 32, 33, 64, 82, river ferry Tha Phra Athit) City-specific tourism office that provides maps, brochures and directions; yellow information booths staffed by student volunteers are located throughout the city. They also operate 20 **tourist information booths** (☀9am-5pm Mon-Sat) in touristed areas.

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT; ☎1672; www.tourismthailand.org) Head Office (off Map p92; ☎0 2250 5500; 1600 Th Petchaburi Tat Mai; ☀8.30am-4.30pm; MRT Petchaburi); Banglamphu (Map p60; ☎0 2283 1500; cnr Th Ratchadamnoen Nok & Th Chakrapatdipong; klong taxi Phan Fah; ☀8.30am-4.30pm); Suvarnabhumi International Airport (☎0 2134 0040; 2nd fl, btwn Gates 2 & 5; ☀24hr).

Travel Agencies

Bangkok is packed with travel agencies where you can book bus and air tickets. Some are reliable, while others are fly-by-night scams issuing bogus tickets or promises of (undelivered) services. Ask for recommendations from fellow travellers before making a major purchase from a travel agent. Generally, it's best to buy bus and train tickets directly from the station rather than through travel agents.

The following are some reputable agencies:

Diethelm Travel (Map p90; ☎0 2660 7000; www.diethelmtravel.com; 14th fl, Kian Gwan Bldg II, 140/1 Th Witthayu/Wireless Rd; BTS Phloen Chit)

STA Travel (Map p82; ☎0 2236 0262; www.sta.travel.co.th; 14th fl, Wall Street Tower, 33/70 Th Surawong; ☀9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat; BTS, MRT Si Lom)

visit beyond (Map p80; ☎0 2630 9371; www.visitbeyond.com; New Road Guest House, 1216/1 Th Charoen Krung; river ferry Tha Oriental; ☀8am-noon & 3-7pm)

i Getting There & Away

Air

Bangkok has two airports. **Suvarnabhumi International Airport** (Map p153; ☎0 2132 1888; www.bangkokairportonline.com), 30km east of central Bangkok, began commercial international and domestic service in 2006 after several years of delay. The airport's name is pronounced *sù-wan-ná-poom*, and it inherited the airport code (BKK) previously used by the old airport at Don Muang. The unofficial airport website has practical information in English, as well as real-time details of arrivals and departures.

Bangkok's former international and domestic **Don Muang Airport** (Map p153; ☎0 2535 1111; www.donmuangairportonline.com), 25km north of central Bangkok, was retired from commercial service in September 2006, only to be partially reopened five months later to handle overflow

from Suvarnabhumi. At the time of research, rumours of the airport's imminent closure had been circulating, but for now it's still serving some domestic flights.

For hotels near either airport, see the boxed text, p117. For details on getting to and from the airports, see p148.

AIRLINES The following carriers service domestic destinations; a few also fly to international destinations. For a list of international carriers, see p768.

Air Asia (nationwide 0 2515 9999; www.airasia.com) Suvarnabhumi International Airport (4th fl, Suvarnabhumi International Airport); Th Khao San (Map p60; 127 Th Tanao; ☎11am-10pm) Flies from Suvarnabhumi to Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Hat Yai, Krabi, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Narathiwat, Phuket, Ranong, Surat Thani, Ubon Ratchathani and Udon Thani.

Bangkok Airways (nationwide 1771; www.bangkokair.com) Head Office (Map p118; 0 2270 6699; 99 Moo 14, Th Viphaewadee; ☎8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Suvarnabhumi International Airport (Map p153; ☎02 134 3960; 4th fl, Suvarnabhumi International Airport) Suvarnabhumi to Chiang Mai, Ko Samui, Lampang, Phuket, Sukhothai and Trat.

Nok Air (nationwide call centre 1318; www.nokair.com) Don Muang Airport (1st fl, Don Muang Airport) Head Office (Map p82; ☎02 627 2000; 17th fl, Rajanakarn Bldg, 183 Th Sathon; ☎) This subsidiary of Thai flies from Don Muang to Buriram, Chiang Mai, Hat Yai, Loei, Mae Sot, Nakhom Phanom, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Nan, Narathiwat, Phitsanulok, Phuket, Roi Et, Sakon Nakhon, Surat Thani, Trang, Ubon Ratchathani and Udon Thani.

One-Two-Go (nationwide 1126; www.flyorientthai.com) Don Muang Airport (1st fl, Don Muang Airport; ☎5am-8pm); Head Office (Map p92; ☎0 2229 4260; 18 Th Ratchadaphisek; ☎8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) Domestic arm of Orient Thai; flies from Don Muang to Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Hat Yai, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Phuket, Trang and Udon Thani.

Solar Air (nationwide 02 535 2455; www.solarair.co.th) Don Muang Airport (1st fl, Don Muang Airport) Solar Air flies 19-seat airplanes between Don Muang and Chumphon, Hua Hin, Loei, Mae Sot, Phrae Nan and Roi Et.

Thai Airways International (THAI; nationwide 02 356 1111; www.thaiair.com) Banglamphu (Map p60; ☎0 288 7000; 6 Th Lan Luang; ☎8am-5pm Mon-Sat & 9am-1pm Sun); Silom (Map p82; ☎0 2288 7000; 485 Th Silom; ☎8am-5pm Mon-Sat); Suvarnabhumi International Airport (☎02 134 5483; 4th fl, Suvarnabhumi International Airport) Operates domestic air services between Suvarnabhumi and Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Hat Yai, Khon Kaen, Ko Samui,

Krabi, Phuket, Surat Thani, Ubon Ratchathani and Udon Thani.

Bus

Bangkok is the centre for bus services that fan out all over the kingdom. For long-distance journeys to popular tourist destinations it is advisable to buy tickets directly from the bus companies located at the bus stations, rather than through travel agents in tourist centres such as Th Khao San. See the boxed text p144, for common transport scams to keep an eye open for.

BUS STATIONS There are three main bus terminals – two of which are located an inconvenient distance from the centre of the city – and a terminal at the public transport centre at Suvarnabhumi Airport with inter-provincial departures. Allow an hour to reach all terminals from most parts of Bangkok.

Eastern bus terminal (Ekamai; Map p92; ☎0 2391 2504; Soi Ekamai/40, Th Sukhumvit; BTS Ekkamai) The departure point for buses to Pattaya, Rayong, Chanthaburi and other points east, except for Aranya Prathet. Most people call it *sà-tàh-nee èk-gà-mai* (Ekamai station). It's near the Ekkamai BTS station.

Northern & Northeastern bus terminal (Mo Chit; Map p118; ☎for northern routes 0 2936 2841, ext 311/442, for northeastern routes 0 2936 2852, ext 611/448; Th Kamphaeng Phet) Located just north of Chatuchak Park, this hectic bus station is also commonly called *kôn sòng mòr chit* (Mo Chit station) – not to be confused with Mo Chit BTS station. Buses depart from here for all northern and northeastern destinations. Buses to Aranya Prathet (near the Cambodian border) also leave from here, not from the Eastern bus terminal as you might expect. To reach the bus station, take BTS to Mo Chit or MRT to Chatuchak Park and transfer onto city bus 3, 77 or 509, or hop on a motorcycle taxi.

Southern bus terminal (Sai Tai Mai; off Map p56; ☎0 2435 1199; Th Bromaratchachonane, Thonburi) The city's new terminal lies a long way west of the centre of Bangkok. Commonly called *sài dái mài*, it's among the more pleasant and orderly in the country. Besides serving as the departure point for all buses south of Bangkok, transport to Kanchanaburi and western Thailand also departs from here. The easiest way to reach the station is by taxi, or you can take bus 79, 159, 201 or 516 from Th Ratchadamnoen Klang or bus 40 from the Victory Monument.

Suvarnabhumi public transport centre (p153; ☎0 2132 1888; Suvarnabhumi Airport) Located 3km from Suvarnabhumi International Airport, this terminal has relatively frequent departures to points east and northeast including Aranya Prathet (for the Cambodian border),

Chanthaburi, Ko Chang, Nong Khai (for the Lao border), Pattaya, Rayong, Trat and Udonthani. It can be reached from the airport by a free shuttle bus.

Minivan

Privately run minivans, called *rót dđo*, are a fast and relatively comfortable way to get between Bangkok and its neighbouring provinces. The biggest minivan stop is just north of the Victory Monument (Map p97), with departures for Aranya Prathet (for the Cambodian border; 230B, 3½ hours, from 6am to 6pm), Lopburi (130B, two hours, 4.30am to 9pm), Mae Klong (Samut Songkhram – for Amphawa; 70B, one hour, from 5.30am to 9pm), Muak Lek (for Khao Yai; 120B, 2½ hours, from 8am to 8pm), Nakhon Pathom (60B, one hour, 6am to 9pm) and the Southern bus terminal (35B, one hour, 6.30am to 9pm).

Directly east of the monument are lines to Ayuthaya (60B, one hour, from 5am to 8.30pm), Ban Phe (for Ko Samet; 200B, 2½ hours, from 6am to 9pm), Pattaya (97B, two hours, from 6am to 8pm) and Suvarnabhumi International Airport (40B, one hour, from 5am to 10.30pm).

Train

Hua Lamphong station (Map p76; ☎ 0 2220 4334, general information & advance booking 1690; www.railway.co.th; Th Phra Ram IV; MRT Hua Lamphong) Hua Lamphong is the terminus for the main rail services to the south, north, northeast and east. See p776 for information about train classes and services.

Bookings can be made in person at the advance booking office (just follow the signs; open from 8.30am to 4pm). The other ticket windows are for same-day purchases, mostly 3rd class. From 5am to 8.30am and 4pm to 11pm, advance bookings can also be made at windows 2 to 11. You can obtain a train timetable from the information window. Avoid smiling 'information' staff who try to direct all arrivals to a travel agency in the mezzanine level.

Hua Lamphong has the following services: shower room, mailing centre, luggage storage, cafes and food courts. To get to the station from Sukhumvit take the MRT to the Hua Lamphong stop. From western points (Banglamphu, Thewet), take bus 53.

Bangkok Noi station (Map p60; next to Siriraj Hospital, Thonburi) Bangkok Noi handles infrequent (and overpriced for foreigners) services to Nakhon Pathom, Kanchanaburi and Nam Tok. The station can be reached by river ferry to Tha Rot Fai. Tickets can be bought at the station.

Wong Wian Yai station (Map p56) This tiny station is the jumping off point of the Mahachai Shortline commuter line to Samut Sakhon (see p152).

i Getting Around

Although Bangkok's rush-hour traffic is the stuff of nightmares, seemingly random acts of *embouteillage* can impede even the shortest trip, any day, any time. If it's an option, going by river, canal or BTS is always the best choice; otherwise assume a 45-minute journey for most outings.

To/From the Airport

At the time of research were still two functioning airports in Bangkok; the vast majority of flights are from the shiny new Suvarnabhumi, but some domestic flights still fly in and out of the old Don Muang Airport. If you need to transfer between the two, pencil in *at least* an hour, as the two airports are at opposite ends of town. Minivans run between the two airports from 6am to 5pm (30B to 50B).

SUVARNABHUMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

The following ground transport options leave directly from the Suvarnabhumi terminal to in-town destinations: metered taxis, hotel limousines, airport rail link, private vehicles and private buses. If there are no metered taxis available kerbside or if the line is too long, you can take the airport shuttle to the taxi stand at the public-transport centre.

The public-transport centre is 3km from Suvarnabhumi and includes a public bus terminal, metered taxi stand and long-term parking. A free airport shuttle bus running both an ordinary and express route connects the transport centre with the passenger terminals.

LOCAL BUS Several other air-conditioned local buses serve the airport's public-transport centre. Bus lines that city-bound tourists are likely to use include 551 (Victory Monument), 554 (Don Muang) and 556 (Th Khao San), and minivan line 552 (to On Nut BTS station) – fares start at 25B. From these points, you can continue on public transport or by taxi to your hotel.

Intercity buses to destinations east including Pattaya, Rayong and Trat stop at the public-transport centre, also reached via the free shuttle from the airport.

From town, you can take the BTS to On Nut, then from near the market entrance opposite Tesco take minivan 522 (25B, about 40 minutes, 6am to 9pm) or AE3 (150B) to the airport.

AIRPORT RAIL LINK In 2010 the much-delayed elevated train service linking central Bangkok and Suvarnabhumi International Airport was finally completed. The system is comprised of a local service, which makes six stops before terminating at Phaya Thai station (Map p97; 30 minutes, 45B), connected by a walkway to BTS at Phaya Thai station, and an express service that runs, without stops, between Phaya Thai and Makkasan stations and the airport (15 min-

utes, 150B). Makkasan, also known as Bangkok City Air Terminal (Map p56), is a short walk from MRT Phetchaburi, and if you arrive at least three hours before your departure, also has check-in facilities for two different airlines (Thai Airways and Lufthansa). Both train lines run from 6am to midnight.

The Airport Rail Link is located on floor B1 of Suvarnabhumi Airport.

TAXI As you exit the terminal, ignore the touts and all the signs pointing you to 'official airport taxis' (which cost 700B flat); instead, descend to the 1st floor to join the generally fast-moving queue for a public taxi. Cabs booked through these desks should always use their meter, but they often try their luck so insist by saying, 'Meter, please'. Typical metered fares from the airport are as follows: 200B to 250B to Th Sukhumvit; 250B to 300B to Th Khao San; 500B to Mo Chit. Toll charges (paid by the passengers) vary between 25B and 45B. Note also that there's an additional 50B surcharge added to all fares departing from the airport, payable directly to the driver.

DON MUANG AIRPORT

There are no longer any express airport buses to/from Don Muang.

BUS Slow, crowded public bus 59 stops on the highway in front of the airport and carries on to Banglamphu, passing Th Khao San and the Democracy Monument; luggage is not allowed. Air-conditioned buses are faster, and you might actually get a seat. Useful routes with air-conditioned buses:

Bus 510 Victory Monument and Southern bus terminal.

Bus 513 Th Sukhumvit and Eastern bus terminal.

Bus 29 Northern bus terminal, Victory Monument, Siam Square and Hua Lamphong train station.

TAXI As at Suvarnabhumi, public taxis leave from outside the arrivals hall and there is a 50B airport charge added to the meter fare. A trip to Banglamphu, including airport change and tollway fees, will set you back about 400B. The fare will be slightly less for a trip to Sukhumvit or Silom.

TRAIN The walkway that crosses from Terminal 1 to the Amari Airport Hotel also provides access to Don Muang train station, which has trains to Hua Lamphong train station every one to 1½ hours from 4am to 11.30am and then roughly every hour from 2pm to 9.30pm (3rd-class 5B to 10B, one hour).

Boat

Once the city's dominant form of transport, public boats still survive along the mighty Mae Nam Chao Phraya and on a few interior *klong*.

CANAL ROUTES

Over the years boat services along Bangkok and Thonburi's *klong* have diminished, but with mounting traffic woes there may be plans to revive these water networks. For now, canal taxi boats run along Khlong Saen Saeb (Banglamphu to Ramkhamhaeng) and are an easy way to get from Banglamphu to Jim Thompson House, the Siam Square shopping centres (get off at Tha Hua Chang for both), and other points further east along Sukhumvit – after a mandatory change of boat at Tha Pratunam. These boats are mostly used by daily commuters and pull into the piers for just a few seconds – jump straight on or you'll be left behind. Fares range from 9B to 21B and boats run from approximately 6am to 7pm.

RIVER ROUTES

Chao Phraya Express (☎ 0 2623 6001; www.chaophrayaboat.co.th) This company provides one of the city's most scenic (and efficient) transport options, running passenger boats

WORTH A TRIP

BANGKOK'S ISLAND GETAWAY

Soothe your nerves with a half-day getaway to **Ko Kret**, a car-free island in the middle of Mae Nam Chao Phraya, at Bangkok's northern edge. Actually an artificial island, the result of dredging a canal in a sharp bend in the river, the island is home to one of Thailand's oldest settlements of Mon people, who were the dominant culture in central Thailand between the 6th and 10th centuries AD. The Mon are also skilled potters, and Ko Kret continues the culture's ancient tradition of hand-thrown earthenware, made from local Ko Kret clay.

If you come on a weekday you'll likely to be the only visitor. There are a couple of temples worth peeking into and a few places to eat, but the real highlight is taking in the bucolic riverside atmosphere. On weekends, things change drastically and Ko Kret is an extremely popular destination for urban Thais. There's heaps more food, drink and things for sale, but with this come the crowds.

The most convenient way to get there is by bus (33 from Sanam Luang) or taxi to Pak Kret, before boarding the cross-river ferry that leaves from Wat Sanam Neua.

along Mae Nam Chao Phraya to destinations both south and north of Bangkok. The central pier is known variously as Tha Sathon and Saphan Taksin, and connects to the Saphan Taksin BTS station, at the southern end of the city. Visitors are most likely to go northwards, to the stops designated with an N prefix.

Tickets range from 13B to 32B and are generally purchased on board the boat, although some larger stations have ticket booths. Either way, hold on to your ticket as proof of purchase.

The company operates express (indicated by an orange, yellow or yellow and green flag), local (without a flag) and tourist boat (larger boat) services. During rush hour, pay close attention to the flag colours to avoid an unwanted journey to a foreign province. Ask for one of the route maps provided at some of the larger piers.

Local (🕒6-8.30am & 3-6pm Mon-Fri; 9-13B) The local line (no flag) serves all company piers between Wat Ratchasingkhon, in south-central Bangkok, north to Nonthaburi, stopping frequently.

Tourist (🕒9.30am-3.30pm; 19B, one-day pass child/adult 80/150B) The more expensive tourist boat offers heaps of seating and English-language commentary (though it may be hard to comprehend); it operates from Tha Sathon to 10 major sightseeing piers, only going as far north as Tha Phra Athit (Banglamphu).

Orange Express (🕒5.50am-6.40pm Mon-Fri, 6am-6.40pm Sat & Sun; 14B) This, the most frequent line, operates between Wat Ratchasingkhon and Nonthaburi with frequent stops.

Yellow Express (🕒6.10-8.40am & 3.45-7.30pm Mon-Fri; 19-28B) The yellow express line operates between Ratburana to Nonthaburi with stops at major piers.

Green-Yellow Express (🕒6.15-8.05am & 4.05-6.05pm Mon-Fri; 11-31B) This rush-hour-only boat takes commuters directly to Pakkret Pier, in the far north of Bangkok.

Blue Express (🕒7-7.45am & 5.05-6.25pm Mon-Fri; 11-32B) Another rush-hour-only boat takes commuters directly to Nonthaburi.

There are also flat-bottomed cross-river ferries that connect Thonburi and Bangkok. These piers are usually next door to the Chao Phraya Express piers and cost 3.5B per crossing.

BTS (Skytrain)

The most comfortable option for travelling in 'new' Bangkok (Silom, Sukhumvit and Siam Square) is the *rôt fai fâh*, BTS or Skytrain, an elevated rail network that sails over the city's notorious traffic jams. The BTS has revolutionised travel in the modern parts of Bangkok. Trips that would have taken an hour now take 15 minutes. Another advantage of the BTS is that it offers a pleasant bird's-eye view of the city, allowing

glimpses of greenery and historic architecture not visible at street level.

So far two lines have been built by the **Bangkok Mass Transit System** (BTS; ☎0 2617 7300; www.bts.co.th) – the Sukhumvit and Silom lines.

The Sukhumvit Line terminates in the north of the city at the Mo Chit station, next to Chatuchak Park, and follows Th Phayathai south to the Siam interchange station at Th Phra Ram I and then swings east along Th Phloenchit and Th Sukhumvit to terminate at Bearing station, at Soi 107, Th Sukhumvit.

The Silom Line runs from the National Stadium station, near Siam Square, and soon after makes an abrupt turn to the southwest, continuing above Th Ratchadamri, down Th Silom to Th Narathiwat Ratchanakharin, then out Th Sathon until it terminates at Wong Wian Yai across the Mae Nam Chao Phraya in Thonburi.

Trains run frequently from 6am to midnight along both lines. Fares vary from 15B to 40B, depending on your destination. Most ticket machines accept 5B and 10B coins only, but change is available from the information booths. The staffed booths are also where you buy value-stored tickets. Brochures available at the information booths detail the various commuter and tourist passes.

Bus

The city's public bus system is operated by **Bangkok Mass Transit Authority** (☎184; www.bmta.co.th); the website is a great source of information on all bus routes, but this doesn't really help the fact that Bangkok's bus system is confusing and generally lacks English. If you're determined, or are pinching pennies, fares for air-conditioned buses typically start at 11B and ordinary (fan) buses start at 6.5B. Smaller privately operated green buses cost 5B.

Most of the bus lines run between 5am and 10pm or 11pm, except for the 'all-night' buses, which run from 3am or 4am to midmorning.

Bangkok Bus Guide by thinknet, available at Kinokuniya and Asia Books (p136), is the most up-to-date route map available. The following bus lines are useful for tourists travelling between Banglamphu and the Siam Square area:

Bus 15 From Tha Phra, on the Thonburi side of the river, to Sanam Luang (accessible to Wat Phra Kaew) with stops at MBK Center (connect to BTS) and Th Ratchadamnoen Klang (accessible to Th Khao San).

Bus 47 Khlong Toei Port to Department of Lands, along Th Phahonyothin, in northern Bangkok, with stops along Th Phra Ram IV, MBK Center, Th Ratchadamnoen and Sanam Luang.

Car

For short-term visitors, you will find parking and driving a car in Bangkok more trouble than it is

FREE RIDE

Launched in 2008, **Bangkok Smile Bike** is a municipally sponsored program encouraging visitors to explore parts of old Bangkok and Thonburi by bicycle. The small green bikes can be borrowed for free, and an expansive tourist route encompassing the areas' major sites has been marked by relatively clear road signs and occasional green bike lanes.

There are five stations spread out between Ko Ratanakosin and Banglamphu, and the suggested starting/ending point is at the southwest corner of Sanam Luang (Map p60), across from the main entrance to Wat Phra Kaew. On the Thonburi side, there are six stations and the suggested starting point is at the base of Saphan Phra Pin Klao Bridge, with the route ending at Saphan Phut, also known as Memorial Bridge. Bikes are available from 10am to 5pm, and you'll need some form of ID to borrow one.

worth. If you need private transport, consider hiring a car and driver through your hotel or hire a taxi driver that you find trustworthy. One reputable operator is **Julie Taxi** (☎08 1846 2014; www.julietaxitour.com), which offers a variety of vehicles and excellent service.

If you're not dissuaded, cars and motorcycles can be rented throughout town, including through such international chains as **Avis** (Map p86; ☎0 2251 2011; www.avisthailand.com; 2/12 Th Withayu/Wireless Rd; ☀8am-6pm; BTS Phloen Chit), opposite the Swiss embassy, or local chains such as **Thai Rent A Car** (☎0 2318 8888; www.thairentacar.com; 2371 Th Petchaburi; MRT Phetchaburi & access by taxi), both of which also have branches at/near Suvarnabhumi airport. Rates start at around 1200B per day, excluding insurance. An International Driving Permit and passport are required for all rentals.

MRT (Metro)

Bangkok's first subway line opened in 2004 and is operated by the **Metropolitan Rapid Transit Authority** (MRTA; ☎0 2624 5200; www.mrta.co.th). Thais call the metro *rôt fai fâh dâi din*.

The 20km Blue Line goes from Hua Lamphong train station to Bang Sue, stopping at 18 stations, including four that link up with the BTS, and one that connects with the airport link. Fares cost 16B to 41B; child and concession fares can be bought at ticket windows. The trains run every seven minutes from 6am to midnight, except during peak hours – 6am to 9am and 4.30pm to 7.30pm – when frequency is less than five minutes. The main advantage for visitors is that the Sukhumvit hotel area is now easily connected to Hua Lamphong train station and Chinatown at one end, and Chatuchak weekend market and the Northern bus terminal at the Bang Sue end.

There are ambitious plans to extend the MRT by more than four times its present length with stabs into northern Bangkok, Samut Prakan and Th Ramkhamhaeng, although if the airport link is anything to judge by, it could be a very long wait indeed.

Motorcycle Taxi

Forming the backdrop of modern Bangkok, teams of cheeky, numbered and vested motorcycle-taxi drivers can be found at the end of just about every long street. A ride to the end (*sùt soy*) or mouth (*bâhk soy*) of an average soi usually costs 10B to 15B. Longer journeys should be negotiated in advance, and can range from 20B to 100B.

Helmets are occasionally available upon request, although considering the way some of these guys drive, any body part is at risk. In particular, keep your legs tucked in – the drivers are used to carrying passengers with shorter legs than those of the average Westerner. Women wearing skirts should sit side-saddle and gather any extra cloth to avoid it catching in the wheel or drive chain.

Taxi

Tâak-see mee-dêu (metered taxis) were introduced in Bangkok in 1993 and the current flag fare of 35B is only a slight increase from that time, making us wonder how these guys (and there are a lot of them) earn any money. Although many first-time visitors are hesitant to use them, in general, Bangkok's taxis are new and spacious and the drivers are courteous and helpful, making them an excellent way to get around. Fares to most places within central Bangkok cost 60B to 80B, and freeway tolls – 20B to 45B depending where you start – must be paid by the passenger.

Taxi Radio (☎1681; www.taxiradio.co.th) and other 24-hour 'phone-a-cab' services are available for 20B above the metered fare. Taxis are usually plentiful except during peak commute hours, when bars are closing (1am to 2am), or when it is raining and your destination requires sitting in too much traffic.

It's generally a good idea to get in taxis that pull up, rather than parked taxis, as the latter often refuse to use their meters. And simply exit any taxi that refuses to use the meter.

Túk-Túk

A ride on Thailand's most emblematic three-wheeled vehicle is an experience particularly sought after by new arrivals, but it only takes a few seconds to realise that most foreigners are too tall to see anything beyond the low-slung roof.

Túk-túk drivers also have a knack for smelling crisp bills and can potentially take you and your wallet far away from your desired destination. In particular, beware of drivers who offer to take you on a sightseeing tour for 10B or 20B – it's a touting scheme designed to pressure you into purchasing overpriced goods. A short trip on a túk-túk should cost at least 50B.

AROUND BANGKOK

If you're itching to get out of the capital city, but don't have a lot of time, consider a day trip to one of the neighbouring towns and provinces. On Bangkok's doorstep are all of Thailand's provincial charms – you don't have to go far to find ancient religious monuments, floating markets, architectural treasures and laid-back fishing villages.

Bangkok to Amphawa

The quaint canal-side village of Amphawa in Samut Songkhram is only 70km southwest of Bangkok, but if you play your cards right, you can reach the town via a multihour journey involving trains, boats and a short ride in the back of a truck. Why? Because sometimes the journey is just as important as the destination.

Your adventure begins when you take a stab into Bangkok's Thonburi looking for the **Wong Wian Yai train station** (Map p56; BTS Wong Wian Yai). Just north of the traffic circle (Wong Wian Yai) is a fairly ordinary food market that camouflages the unceremonious terminal of this commuter line, known in English as the Mahachai Shortline. Hop on one of the hourly trains (10B, one hour, from 5.30am to 8.10pm) to Samut Sakhon and you're on your way.

Only 15 minutes after you leave the station the city density yields to squatty villages where you can peek into homes, temples and shops, many of which are only arm's length from the tracks. Further on, palm trees, small rice fields and marshes filled with giant elephant ears and canna lilies line the route, tamed only briefly by little whistle-stop stations. The backwater farms

evaporate quickly as you enter **Samut Sakhon**, also known as Mahachai, a bustling port town several kilometres from the Gulf of Thailand and the end of the first rail segment.

After working your way through what must be one of the most hectic fresh markets in the country, you'll come to a vast harbour clogged with water hyacinth and wooden fishing boats. Before the 17th century, the town was known as Tha Jiin (Chinese Pier) because of the large number of Chinese junks that called here.

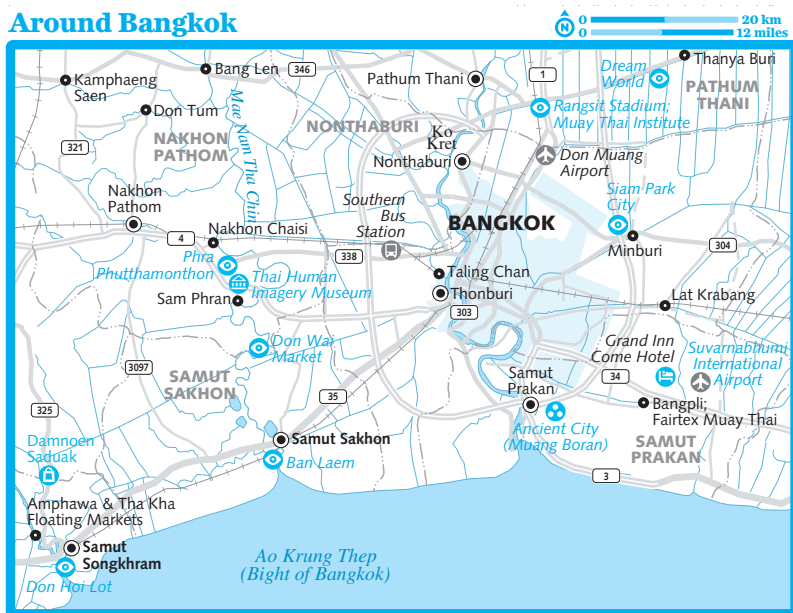
Occupying the imposing ferry building, the seafood **Tarua Restaurant** (no roman-script sign; 859 Th Sethakit, Samut Sakhon; dishes 60-200B; ☺lunch & dinner) offers views over the harbour and an English-language menu. Board the ferry to **Ban Laem** (3B to 5B).

Arriving on the opposite side, the **Jao Mae Kuan Im Shrine** at **Wat Chong Lom** is a 9m-high fountain in the shape of the Mahayana Buddhist Goddess of Mercy. To get here, take a motorcycle taxi (10B) from the pier for the brief ride to Wat Chong Lom. Conveniently located just beside the shrine is Tha Chalong, a train station with departures for your next destination, Samut Songkhram at 10.10am, 1.30pm and 4.40pm (10B, one hour).

You'll know when you've reached **Samut Songkhram**, also known as Mae Klong, when it looks like you've crashed into the town's wet market. In fact, the market is held directly on the train tracks, and vendors must frantically scoop up their wares as the trains come through.

At the mouth of Mae Nam Mae Klong river is the province's most famous tourist attraction: a bank of fossilised shells known as **Don Hoi Lot**. The shell bank can really only be seen during the dry season when the river surface has receded to its lowest level (typically April and May), but most visit for the perennial seafood restaurants (open lunch and dinner) that have been built at the edge of Don Hoi Lot. To get there you can hop into a *sǒrng-tǎa-ou* in front of Somdet Phra Phuttalertla Hospital at the intersection of Th Prasitpattana and Th Tammimit; the trip takes about 15 minutes (15B). Or, if it's afternoon and the water is high enough, you can charter a boat from the Mae Klong Market pier (*tǎh dǎ-lǎht mǎa glǒrng*), a scenic round-trip journey of around 45 minutes (1000B).

Around Bangkok



To reach your final destination, charter a boat (800B) or hop in a *sörng-tāa-ou* (8B) near the market for the 10-minute ride to **Amphawa**.

Amphawa

อัมพวา

This canalside village has become a popular destination for city folk who seek out its quintessentially “Thai” setting. This urban influx has sparked a few signs of gentrification, but the canals, old wooden buildings, atmospheric cafes and quaint waterborne traffic still retain heaps of charm. From Friday to Sunday, Amphawa puts on a floating market (p154). Alternatively, visit on a weekday and you’ll probably be the only tourist.

👁️ Sights

Steps from Amphawa’s central footbridge is **Wat Amphawan Chetiyaram**, a graceful temple believed to be located at the place of the family home of Rama II, and which features accomplished murals. A short walk from the temple is **King Buddhalertla (Phuttha Loet La) Naphalai Memorial Park** (admission 20B; ☀️8.30am-5pm), a museum housed in a collection of traditional central Thai houses set on 1.5 landscaped hectares. Dedicated to Rama II, the museum

contains a library of antiques from early-19th-century Siam.

At night long-tail boats zip through Amphawa’s sleeping waters to watch the Christmas light-like dance of the *hìng hōy*, fireflies, most populous during the wet season. From Friday to Sunday, several operators from several piers lead tours, charging 60B for a seat. Outside of these days, it costs 500B for a two-hour charter.

🛏️ Sleeping & Eating

Amphawa is popular with Bangkok’s weekend warriors, and it seems like virtually every other house has opened its doors to tourists in the form of homestays. These can range from little more than a mattress on the floor and a mosquito net to upscale guest house-style accommodation. Rooms with fan start at about 200B while rooms with air-con, many of which share bathrooms, begin at about 1000B. Prices are half this on weekdays.

If you prefer something a bit more private, consider **Ploen Amphawa Resort** (☎️08 1458 9411; www.ploenamphawa.com; Th Rim Khlong; r incl breakfast 1400-2500B; 🏠🚶), or **ChababaanCham Resort** (☎️08 1984 1000; Th Rim Khlong; r incl breakfast 1900-2400B; 🏠🚶), an attractive but somewhat overpriced

FLOATING MARKETS

(ตลาดน้ำ)

The photographs of Thailand's floating markets – wooden canoes laden with multicoloured fruits and vegetables, paddled by women wearing indigo-hued clothes and wide-brimmed straw hats – have become an iconic and alluring image for the kingdom. The markets are also a sentimental piece of history. In the past 20 years, Thailand has modernised, replacing canals with roads, and boats with motorcycles and cars. The floating markets, which were once lively trading posts for produce farmers and local housewives, have mostly crawled ashore.

The most heavily promoted floating market is **Damnoen Saduak** (Map p153; ☀7am–4pm Sat & Sun), 104km southwest of Bangkok and north of Samut Songkhram on the road to Nakhon Pathom. Though little more than a souvenir market catering to tourists, it is one of the most accessible markets from Bangkok and is ideal for those who haven't yet filled their suitcases with touristy gifts. Air-conditioned buses 78 and 996 go direct from the Southern bus terminal in Thonburi (off Map p56) to Damnoen Saduak (80B, two hours, every 20 minutes from 6am to 9pm). Most buses will drop tourists off directly at the piers that line Th Sukhaphiban 1, which is the land route to the floating market area. The going rate for boat hire is about 300B per person per hour. A yellow *sǎrng-tāa-ou* (pick-up truck, also spelt *sǎwngthǎew*; 5B) does a frequent loop between the floating market and the bus stop in town.

A closer descendant of the original floating markets, **Taling Chan** (Map p56; ☀7am–4pm Sat & Sun), west of Bangkok, offers less of a sales pitch than Damnoen Saduak. On the access road to Khlong Bangkok Noi, Taling Chan looks like any other fresh-food market busy with produce vendors from nearby farms. But the twist emerges at the canal where several floating docks serve as informal dining rooms, and the kitchens are canoes tethered to the docks. Many local Thai families come to feast on grilled shrimp and noodles, all produced aboard a bobbing boat. Taling Chan is in Thonburi and can be reached from any bus stop along Bangkok's Th Ratchadamnoen Klang in Banglamphu, via air-con bus 79 (16B, 25 minutes). Long-tail boats from any large Bangkok pier can also be hired for a trip to Taling Chan and the nearby Khlong Chak Phra.

Not technically a swimmer, **Don Wai Market** (Map p153; Talat Don Wai; ☀6am–6pm) claims a riverbank location in Nakhon Pathom Province, having originally started out in the early 20th century as a floating market for pomelo and jackfruit growers and traders. Like many tourist attractions geared towards Thais, the main draw here is food, such as fruit, traditional sweets and *bèt pǎlǎh* (five-spice stewed duck), which can be consumed onboard large boats that cruise the Nakhon Chaisi River (60B, one hour). The easiest way to reach Don Wai Market is to take a minibus (45B, 35 minutes) from beside Central Pinklao (Map p56) in Thonburi.

The **Amphawa Floating Market** (ตลาดน้ำอัมพวา; *dalat nám ampáwah*; Map p153; ☀4–9pm Fri–Sun), about 7km northwest of Samut Songkhram, is a popular weekend destination for Bangkok residents. There are other floating markets nearby that meet in the mornings on particular lunar days, including **Tha Kha Floating Market** (Map p153; ☀7am–noon weekends on 2nd, 7th & 12th day of waxing & waning moons). Tha Kha convenes along an open, breezy *klorng* lined with greenery and old wooden houses. Call Amphawa's **Tourism Authority of Thailand office** (☎0 3475 2847) for specific dates.

resort just off the canal, or **Baan Ku Pu** (☎0 3472 5920; Th Rim Khlong; d 1000B; ☼), a collection of wooden bungalows.

Amphawa has basic restaurants and a simple night market open each evening. If you're in town on a weekend, get your eats at the fun **Amphawa Floating Market** (ด่า-ลัถ nám am-pá-wah; dishes 20–40B; ☀4–9pm Fri–Sun),

where *pàt tai* and other noodle dishes are served directly from boats.

i Getting There & Away

See p152 for an enjoyable itinerary for getting to Amphawa. You can return the same way; however, it's much more convenient to hop on one of the frequent minivans that depart from Samut Songkhram's market (and on weekends,

from Amphawa) to Bangkok's Victory Monument (70B, one hour, from 5.30am to 8pm) in Rat-chathewi. Alternatively, you can flag down one of several buses to/from Damnoen Saduak that ply the highway near Amphawa, terminating at Bangkok's Southern bus terminal (80B, one hour).

Nakhon Pathom

นครปฐม

POP 120,000

Nakhon Pathom is a typical central Thai city, with the Phra Pathom Chedi as a visible link to its claim as the country's oldest settlement. The town's name, which derives from the Pali 'Nagara Pathama' meaning 'First City', appears to lend some legitimacy to this boast.

The modern town is quite sleepy, but it is an easy destination to see everyday Thai ways and practise your newly acquired language skills on a community genuinely appreciative of such efforts.

Sights

Phra Pathom Chedi

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(พระปฐมเจดีย์, admission free) In the centre of town, rising to 127m, is one of the tallest Buddhist monuments in the world. The original stupa, which is buried within the massive orange-glazed dome, was erected in the early 6th century by the Theravada Buddhists of Dvaravati (possibly at the same time as Myanmar's famous Shwedagon stupa). But, in the early 11th century the Khmer king, Suryavarman I of Angkor, conquered the city and built a Brahman *prang* (Hindi/Khmer-style stupa) over the sanctuary. The Burmese of Bagan, under King Anawrahta, sacked the city in 1057 and the *prang* lay in ruins until Rama IV (King Mongkut) had it restored in 1860. The temple is best visited on weekends when local families come to make merit.

On the eastern side of the monument, in the *bôht*, is a **Dvaravati-style Buddha** seated in a European pose similar to the one in Wat Phra Meru in Ayuthaya. It may, in fact, have come from there.

Also of interest are the many examples of Chinese sculpture carved from a greenish stone that came to Thailand as ballast in the bottom of 19th-century Chinese junks. Opposite the *bôht* is a **museum** (admission by donation; ☉9am-4pm Wed-Sun), with some interesting Dvaravati sculpture and lots of old junk. Within the chedi complex is **Lablao Cave**, an artificial tunnel containing the shrine of several Buddha figures.

The **wát** surrounding the stupa enjoys the kingdom's highest temple rank, Rachavoramahavihan; it's one of only six temples so honoured in Thailand. King Rama VI's ashes are interred in the base of the Sukhothai-era Phra Ruang Rochanarit, a large standing Buddha image in the wát's northern *wi-hähn*.

Phutthamonthon

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(พุทธมณฑล) Southeast of the city stands this Sukhothai-style standing Buddha designed by Corrado Feroci. At 15.8m, it is reportedly the world's tallest, and it's surrounded by a 400-hectare landscaped park that contains sculptures representing the major stages in the Buddha's life (eg a 6m-high dharma wheel, carved from a single slab of granite).

All Bangkok-Nakhon Pathom buses pass by the access road to the park at Phra Phutthamonthon Sai 4; from there you can walk, hitch or flag down a *sǒrng-tāa-ou* into the park itself. From Nakhon Pathom you can also take a white-and-purple Salaya bus; the stop is on Th Tesa across from the post office.

Don Wai Market

MARKET

(ตลาดดอนหวาย) On the banks of Mae Nam Nakhon Chaisi, is another worthwhile destination. See p154 for details on getting here.

Eating

Nakhon Pathom has an excellent market along the road between the train station and Phra Pathom Chedi; its *kǒw lāhm* (sticky rice and coconut steamed in a length of bamboo) is reputed to be the best in Thailand. There are many good, inexpensive food vendors and restaurants in this area.

Getting There & Away

Nakhon Pathom is 64km west of Bangkok. The city doesn't have a central bus station, but most transport arrives and departs from near the market and train station.

The most convenient and fastest way to get to Nakhon Pathom is on a *rót dǎo* (shared minivan) from Bangkok's Victory Monument (60B; Map p97). Vans leave when full, generally from 6am to about 6pm.

There are also more frequent trains from Bangkok's Hua Lamphong station in Chinatown (14B to 60B, one hour) throughout the day. Nakhon Pathom is also on the spur rail line that runs from Thonburi's Bangkok Noi station (Map p60) to Kanchanaburi's Nam Tok station, although because of the route's status as a 'tourist line' the fares are exorbitantly high for foreigners.

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