

lonely planet

Bangkok

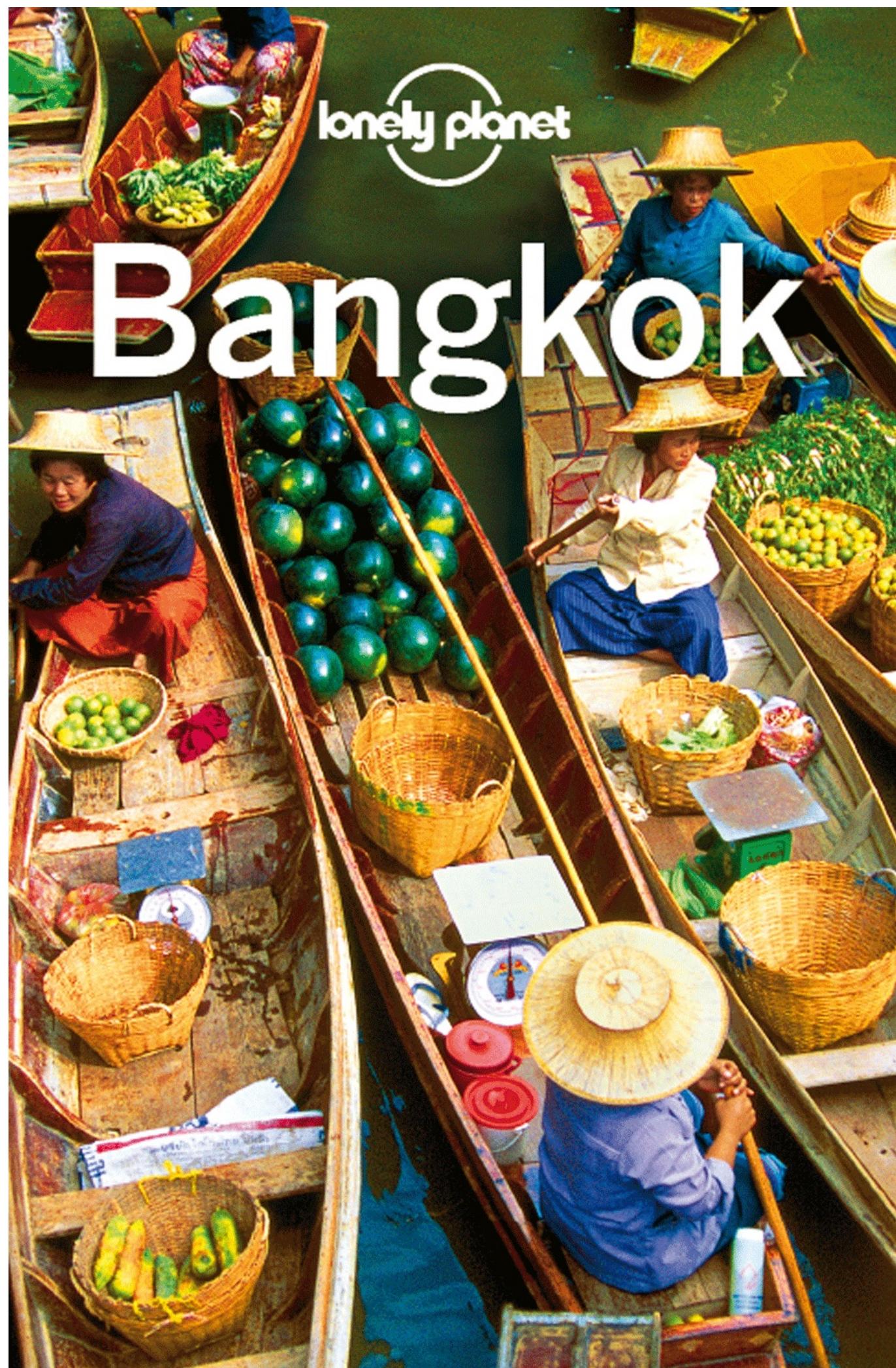


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AD 30, complete with a *nympholeion*. You can still see the carved Roman landing stage towards the rear of the cave.

Capri

Top Sights

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Welcome to Bangkok

Same same, but different. This Thai T-shirt philosophy sums up Bangkok, where many tastes make an often-spicy dish.

Full-On Food

Until you've eaten on a Bangkok street, your noodles mingling with your sweat, and your senses dulled by chilli, exhaust and noise, you haven't actually eaten real Thai food. It can be an overwhelming mix: the underlying flavours – spicy, sour, sweet and salty – aren't exactly meat and potatoes. But for those who love full-on cuisine and don't need white tablecloths, there's probably no better dining destination in the world. And with immigration bringing every regional Thai and international cuisine to the capital, it's also a truly diverse experience.

Fun Folks

The language barrier may seem huge, but it has never prevented anybody from loving the Thai people. The capital's cultural underpinnings are evident in virtually all facets of everyday life, and most enjoyably through its residents' sense of *sà·nùk* (fun). In Bangkok, anything worth doing should have an element of *sà·nùk*. Ordering food, changing money and haggling at markets will usually involve a sense of playfulness – a dash of flirtation, perhaps, and a smile. It's a language that doesn't require words, and one that's easy to learn.

Urban Exploration

With so much of life conducted on the street, there are few cities in the world that reward exploration as handsomely as Bangkok. Cap off an extended boat trip with a visit to a hidden market. A stroll off Banglamphu's beaten track can end in conversation with a monk. Get lost in the tiny lanes of Chinatown and come face to face with a live Chinese opera performance. After dark, let the BTS (Skytrain) escort you to Th Sukhumvit, where the local nightlife scene reveals a sophisticated and dynamic city.

Contrasts

It's the contradictions that give the City of Angels its rich, multifaceted personality. Scratch the surface and you'll find a city of climate-controlled megamalls and international brand names just minutes from 200-year-old village homes; gold-spined Buddhist temples sharing space with neon-lit strips of sleaze; slow-moving rivers of traffic bypassed by long-tail boats plying the royal river; and streets lined with food carts, overlooked by restaurants at the top of skyscrapers. As Bangkok races toward the future, rest assured that these contrasts will continue to supply the city with its never-ending Thai-ness.



Traditional Thai dancers at Wat Arun ([CLICK HERE](#))
HUGH SITTON / CORBIS ©

Why I Love Bangkok

By Austin Bush, Author

Admittedly, there are some things – the hot weather, the pollution, the political instability – that make Bangkok a less-than-ideal city. But there's so much more that makes it amazing. I love the food. What other city has such a full-flavoured, no-holds-barred, insatiable, fanatical approach to eating? I love old Bangkok. Districts such as Banglamphu and Chinatown still carry the grit and character of the city that used to be. And I'd be lying if I didn't also say that I love new Bangkok – don't we all have a soft spot for megamalls and air-con?

For more about our authors, [CLICK HERE](#) .

Bangkok's Top 10

Open-Air Dining ([CLICK HERE](#))

1 Bangkok's reputation as a polluted city belies its forte as an outdoor-dining capital. Despite the modern conveniences of air-conditioning and fashion cafes, some of the most memorable meals in the city also called the 'Big Mango' are had at the open-air markets and food stalls that make it possible to nibble the day away. Forget about three square meals: in Bangkok, locals snack throughout the day, packing away at least four meals before sunset - and so should you.

 *Eating*



RAYLASKOWITZ / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©

Jim Thompson's House ([CLICK HERE](#))

2 American entrepreneur Jim Thompson used his traditional Thai-style home as a repository for ageing Thai traditions and artwork. Thompson mysteriously disappeared in 1967, but today his former home is a museum – one that visitors secretly wishes to live in for a day or more. Why? The rooms are adorned with his exquisite art collection and personal possessions, including rare Chinese porcelain pieces and Burmese, Cambodian and Thai artefacts, and the garden is a miniature jungle of tropical plants and lotus ponds, converging in the epitome of the Thai house.

📍 *Siam Square, Pratunam, Ploenchit & Ratchathewi*



Chatuchak Weekend Market ([CLICK HERE](#))

3 In a city obsessed with commerce, Chatuchak Weekend Market takes the prize as Bangkok's biggest and baddest market. Silks, sneakers, fighting cocks and fighting fish, fluffy puppies and souvenirs for the insatiable *fa·ràng* (Westerner) – if it can be sold in Thailand, you'll find it here. From everyday to clubby, clothes dominate much of the market, but this being Thailand, food and drink also have a strong and refreshing presence, making Chatuchak as much about entertainment as is about shopping.

 **Greater Bangkok**



PORTRAITS OF ROYALTY AT CHATUCHAK WEEKEND MARKET
KRZYSZTOF DYDYSKI / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©

Banglamphu ([CLICK HERE](#))

4 Easily Bangkok's most charming neighbourhood, Banglamphu is the city's former aristocratic heart, once filled with minor royalty and riverside mansions. Today the old quarter is dominated by antique shophouses, backpackers seeking R&R on famous Th Khao San, civil servants sauntering between offices and lunch spots, and Bangkok's only enclave of bohemian artists and students. Vendor carts and classic restaurants make a patchwork quilt of Banglamphu, allowing ample sightseeing for roving stomach, and the area is also home to some of the city's best bars.

Banglamphu



TUK-TUKS ON THKHAO SAN
PETER UNGER / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©

Wat Pho ([CLICK HERE](#))

5 The grounds of Wat Pho date from the 16th century, predating Bangkok itself. In addition to being the country's biggest temple, Wat Pho is home to a school for traditional Thai medicine, where on-site massage pavilions facilitate that elusive convergence of sightseeing and relaxation. Still not impressed? Let us not forget Wat Pho's primary Buddha – a reclining figure that nearly dwarfs its sizeable shelter. Symbolic of Buddha's death and passage into nirvana, the reclining Buddha measures 46m and is gilded with gold leaf, making it truly larger than life.

 *Ko Ratanakosin & Thonburi*



RECLINING BUDDHA AT WAT PHO
KIMBERLEY COOLE / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©

Mae Nam Chao Phraya ([CLICK HERE](#))

6 Mae Nam Chao Phraya (Chao Phraya River) is always teeming with activity: hulking freighter boats trail behind dedicated tugs, river-crossing ferries skip across the wake, and children practise cannonballs into the muddy water. You can witness this from the shore (ideally from Ko Ratanakosin or Thonburi), from a chartered long-tail boat, or while on the deck of a river taxi. Regardless of your vantage point, as evening sets in and the blinding sun slips into serene streaks of reds and golds, soot Bangkok suddenly looks beautiful.

 *Ko Ratanakosin & Thonburi*



WAT ARUN, SEEN FROM MAE NAM CHAO PHRAYA
RICHARD I'ANSON / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©

Shopping ([CLICK HERE](#))

7 Even avowed anticonsumerists weaken in Bangkok. One minute they're touting the virtues of a life without material possessions, the next they're admiring the fake Rolex watches and mapping out the route to MBK. Bangkok's malls, however, are just a warm-up for the markets, the cardio workout of shopping. In this city, footpaths are for additional retail space, not for pedestrians. In addition to Chatuchak Weekend Market – one of the world's largest markets – Bangkok is home to an emerging fashion scene and, thanks to the diplomatic corps, a long-running sartorial tradition.

Shopping



GAYSORN PLAZA SHOPPING MALL ([CLICK HERE](#))
AUSTIN BUSH / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©

Chinatown ([CLICK HERE](#))

8 Forgive us for positing that Bangkok's Chinatown is something of an Asian El Dorado. The main artery, Th Yaowarat, is crowded with gold shops – sealed glass-front buildings that look more like Chinese altars than downtown jewellers. Likewise, the Buddha statue at Wat Traimit has more gold than you've ever seen in one place, and the pencil-thin lanes that branch off Talat Mai are decked with gold-leaf-coated goods. Add to this the pure energy bundled into blazing neon signs and belching buses and you have the urban explorer's fantasy.

Chinatown



Thai Cookery Schools ([CLICK HERE](#))

9 Why let a plump tummy be the only sign of your visit to Thailand? Instead, learn to create the kingdom's zesty dishes in your own kitchen to counter a ho-hum menu or spice up a dinner party. Cooking schools in Bangkok range from formal affairs for amateur chefs to home cooking for the recipe-phobic. Everyone always has a grand time, visiting a wet market, fumbling with ingredients, tasting the fruits of their labour and trotting home with new cooking techniques.

 *Sports & Activities*



AUSTIN BUSH / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©

Songkran ([CLICK HERE](#))

10 With origins in an ancient religious practice of Buddha images being ‘bathed’, in recent decades the celebration of the Thai lunar new year has devolved into a citywide water fight. If the idea of no-holds-barred water-based warfare appeals to you, make a point of being in Bangkok during April. Festivities include open-air concerts, visits to Buddhist temples and, yes, water-throwing. Foreigners, especially well-dressed ones, are obvious targets for the latter, and the majority of the mayhem occurs on Th Khao San.

🌸 *Month by Month*



RICHARD I'ANSON / LONELYPLANET IMAGES ©

What's New

White Guys Cooking Thai Food

The last few years have seen a handful of foreigners open Thai restaurants in Bangkok. Thais can be very protective about their cuisine, and the chefs involved generated a huge amount of local and international press – not all of it favourable. The storm has since passed, and in its wake we reap the benefit of several excellent Thai restaurants including [nahm](#) ([CLICK HERE](#)), [Bo.lan](#) ([CLICK HERE](#)), [Sra Bua](#) ([CLICK HERE](#)) and [Soul Food Mahanakorn](#) ([CLICK HERE](#)).

Talat Rot Fai

Watch out Chatuchak: despite the distinct emphasis on the retro, Talat Rot Fai is Bangkok's newest and hottest open-air market.

NapPark Hostel

Flashpacker hostels have been around for a while now, but few can top the hi-tech dorm beds that come equipped with a mini-TV, wi-fi and a reading lamp at his new place.

Helping Hands

Unlike most Thai cookery courses, which are held in upscale hotels, this new outfit is located in a Bangkok slum and 10% of the profits go back to the community.

Praya Palazzo

Making the old new, this long forgotten 19th-century riverside mansion was turned into one of Bangkok's classiest boutique hotels in 2011.

Club Culture

Bangkok's quirkiest club has relocated to new digs in an almost NYC-style warehouse-like building, a short distance from Th Khao San.

Wat Traimit

The home of the Golden Buddha has seen a significant renovation, the results of which include a new structure to house the statue as well as two worthwhile museums.

Hyde & Seek

This classy bar's take on homey dishes and clever cocktails singlehandedly introduced Bangkok to the concept of the gastropub.

ZudRangMa Records

Thai DJ Maft Sai has opened his record collection to the public. Come here to flip through vintage Thai vinyl or to pick up a copy of the eponymous label's compilations.

Iron Fairies

In recent years Bangkok bars have moved away from tired themes and towards more sophisticated concepts. Case in point is this sexy new bar, which emulates an antique fairy factory.

ThaiCraft Fair

This organisation, which supports rural industry, has been around for more than 20 years, but its recently initiated craft fairs are a fresh alternative to the standard souvenir shop.



For more recommendations and reviews, see lonelyplanet.com/bangkok

Need to Know

Currency

Thai baht (B)

Language

Thai

Visas

International air arrivals receive a 30-day visa; 60-day visas available from a Thai consulate before leaving home. For more information see Directory ([CLICK HERE](#)).

Money

ATMs widespread; 150B foreign-account fee. Upmarket places accept Visa and MasterCard.

Mobile Phones

GSM and 3G network through inexpensive pre-paid SIM cards.

Time

Asia/Bangkok (GMT/UTC plus seven hours)

Tourist Information

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT; ☎1672; www.tourismthailand.org) National tourism department.

Bangkok Information Center (☎0 2225 7612-5; www.bangkoktourist.com) City-specific tourism office; staffed booths throughout city.

Your Daily Budget

The following are average costs per day.

Budget less than 1500B

- » Dorm bed/basic guesthouse room 160B to 800B
- » Street-stall meals
- » A couple of the big-hitter sights, supplemented with free temples and parks
- » Get around town using public transport

Midrange 1500B to 3000B

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