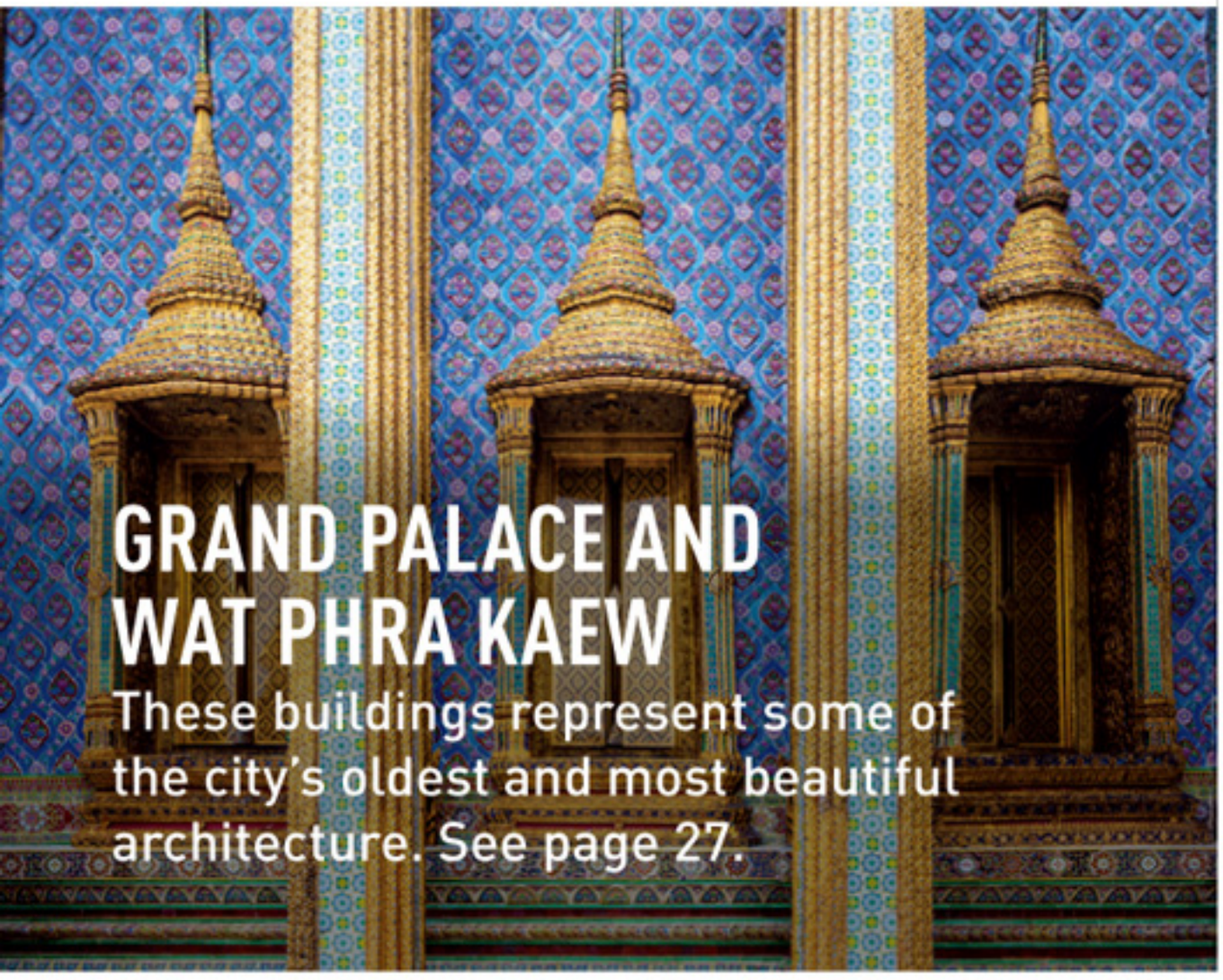
Berlitz

BANGKOK

POCKET GUIDE

TOP 10 ATTRACTIONS



GRAND PALACE AND WAT PHRA KAEW

These buildings represent some of the city's oldest and most beautiful architecture. See page 27.



WAT TRAIMIT

The temple houses a 5.5-tonne solid gold Buddha. See page 40.



ROYAL BARGES NATIONAL MUSEUM

Offers a glimpse into a water-borne world of ceremony and pageantry. See page 44.



KHAO SAN ROAD

Asia's biggest and most popular backpacking hub. See page 54.



VIMANMEK MANSION

Built from teak, it is the city's most splendid example of Victorian-meets-Thai architecture. See page 58.



WAT PHO

Bangkok's oldest temple contains the longest reclining Buddha in Thailand. See page 31.



JIM THOMPSON'S HOUSE

Visit the famous expat's house, full of beautiful art and antiques. See page 62.



ERAWAN SHRINE

Traditional spirit worship and Hinduism combine here. See page 65.



THONBURI

Colourful longtail boats ply its network of canals, offering another perspective on the city. See page 42.



NATIONAL MUSEUM

Every period of Thai history is displayed and documented in its stately buildings. See page 35.

A PERFECT DAY





8.30am

Breakfast

Get an early start and a river breeze to beat the heat with breakfast on the terrace of the Mandarin Oriental. It is rich with history, as Bangkok's most famous hotel, and the boats lend a relaxing backdrop.

9.30am

Chinatown

A 15-minute taxi ride and you're at Wat Mangkon Kamalawat, Chinatown's biggest and most important temple. Later, wander down the evocative Soi Itsaranupap, a historic lane packed with Chinese culture, traditional streetfood and a 200 year-old market.

11.30am

Art shows

Next take a taxi to the Bangkok Art & Culture Centre, which has temporary exhibitions of local and international works displayed over several floors. The gallery often features Thailand's best established and rising stars.

12.30pm

Siam Square

The Siam Square zone marks the beginning of Bangkok's downtown shopping malls, so there's lots of choice when it comes to lunch. A good option is the ground floor food court at Siam Paragon mall for a range of local streetfood, reasonably priced and in air-conditioned comfort.

1.30pm

Ocean World

In the basement of Siam Paragon is Ocean World, which has tanks containing some 30,000 marine species. You can take a glass-bottomed boat ride, go diving with sharks and marvel at South African penguins.

IN BANGKOK





4.00pm

Time for pampering

After a long day, there's nothing better than a relaxing massage, and Bangkok is full of pampering options. The nearby Grand Hyatt Erawan hotel has a luxury rooftop day spa, while Siam Square has many streetside parlours to ease those aching limbs.

2.30pm

Shopping

Paragon is just one of many malls along this stretch, with a phenomenal choice, whether you want high fashion, smartphones, spices, or copies of master artworks executed by painters in MBK. You can use skywalks between several of the malls, so you avoid the cluttered pavements below.

9.00pm

Nightlife

Still at the bottom end of Silom Road, Maggie Choo's is one of the city's classiest and most imaginative nightlife spots. It's based on a vision of slinky 1930s' Shanghai, with a slightly naughty vibe, great sounds and serious drinks. They also have a period-style noodle shop, so you could just as easily eat here.

5.30pm

Sunset cocktails

A taxi to the bottom of Silom Road brings you to Sirocco, a 300-metre-high rooftop restaurant and bar that provides a stunning view for sunset cocktails. Either linger here for dinner or take a five-minute walk around the corner for a choice of Thai at Harmonique.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 10

A BRIEF HISTORY 15

WHERE TO GO 27

Ko Rattanakosin (Royal Island) 27
Grand Palace and Wat Phra Kaew 27, Wat Pho (Wat Phra Chetuphon) 31, Museum of Siam 32, Lak Meuang and Sanam Luang 33, Wat Mahathat 34, National Museum 35

Chinatown and around 36
Pahurat 39, Eastern Chinatown and Hualamphong 39

Thonburi 42
Thonburi canals 43, Royal Barges National Museum 44, Forensic Medicine Museum 45, Wat Arun 45, Santa Cruz Church 47

Old Bangkok 48
Wat Suthat 49, Monk's Bowl Village (Ban Baht) 49, The Golden Mount 51, Democracy Monument 52, October 14 Memorial and Museum 52, Khao San Road 54, Phra Sumen Fort and Santichaiprakan Park 55

Dusit 55
Dusit Park 57, Dusit Zoo 61

Central Bangkok 61
Jim Thompson's House 62, Bangkok Art and Culture Centre 63, Siam Square 63, Wang Suan Pakkard 64, Thap Thim Shrine 65, Erawan Shrine 65, Lumphini Park 66, Snake Farm 67

Silom and Bangrak 68
Sri Mariamman Temple (Maha Uma Devi Temple) 69, Kukrit Pramoj Heritage House 70, Patpong 70

Excursions from Bangkok 70
Ko Kret 71, Ancient City (Muang Boran) 72, Ayutthaya 73, Phra Pathom Chedi 76, Floating markets 77, Kanchanaburi 77, Ko Samet 81

WHAT TO DO 83

Shopping 83
Entertainment 90
Sport 96
Children's Bangkok 98

EATING OUT 100

A–Z TRAVEL TIPS 116

RECOMMENDED HOTELS 135

DICTIONARY 143

INDEX 175

FEATURES

River re-routing 16
International influence 19
Historical landmarks 25
The travelling Buddha 29
Buddhist insight meditation 33
Bangkok's waterworld 46
Rama V cult 56
Ayutthaya festivals 75
Thai tailors 88
Go-go bars 93
Calendar of events 99
Eating Thai-style 102
Durians 105

INTRODUCTION

Bangkok is one of the most exciting and dynamic cities in Southeast Asia. Double-digit economic growth during the 1980s and 1990s brought air-conditioned shopping malls, elevated and underground urban railways and world-class architectural experiments. A severe recession in the late 1990s nearly halted the economy but prompted an inwardly focused artistic renaissance that included critically hailed Thai new-wave cinema and an explosion of independent music. Recent years have seen renewed economic buoyancy and rapid building, but also social unrest and mass demonstrations. Despite these troubles Bangkok continues to lure curious visitors with its unique blend of the spiritual, carnal and entrepreneurial.

A DISTINCTIVE CAPITAL

Straddling the Chao Phraya River delta, metropolitan Bangkok covers 1,569 sq km (606 sq miles) and sprawls into the neighbouring provinces of Nonthaburi, Samut Prakan and Samut Sakhon. The rivers and tributaries of northern and central Thailand drain into the Chao Phraya River, which in turn disgorges into the Gulf of Thailand, a vast cul-de-sac of the South China Sea only a few kilometres from central Bangkok.

The capital is surrounded on three sides by a huge, wet, flat and extremely fertile area known as 'the rice bowl of Asia' – more rice is grown here than in any other area of comparable size in all of Asia. Thailand has, in fact, been the world's top exporter of rice for at least the last 30 years. A vast spider web of natural and artificial canals fan out through this sultry river delta for several hundred square kilometres. Criss-crossing the city in all directions, these murky green waterways conjure up a parallel universe in which

18th-century Siam collides with 21st-century Thailand.

The capital is administered as a separate province, and has the only elected governorship in the nation (other provincial governors are appointed by the ministry). Press freedoms envied by neighbouring nations have made Bangkok Asia's largest base for foreign media correspondents. As a primary gateway for investment in neighbouring Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, the city also serves as a financial hub for mainland Southeast Asia.



The skytrain passing through the city at night

Banking, finance, wholesale and retail trade, transport, tourism and energy dominate the immediate municipality, while the surrounding metropolitan area adds manufacturing, shipping, food processing and intensive farming to the list of top revenue producers. Per capita income in metropolitan Bangkok runs well above the average in the rest of the country.

Figures on Bangkok's infamous nightlife-based economy are difficult to come by. When Longman's *Dictionary of Contemporary English* defined Bangkok as 'a place where there are a lot of prostitutes', Thais filed diplomatic protests and staged demonstrations outside the British Embassy. Longman withdraw the offending edition from circulation, but the blunder was echoed a few years later when Microsoft's *Encarta* labelled Bangkok as a 'commercial sex hub', resulting in a lawsuit and revision of the entry.