

Golden Wonderland



Wat Pho, Bangkok



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Wat Phra Kaeo (Temple of the Emerald Buddha)

An Exotic Kaleidoscope

Throughout 700 years of independence, the Thai Kingdom has displayed an amazing continuity, underpinned by the people's unwavering adherence to Buddhism, the national religion, and to the monarchy, which, became a constitutional monarchy in 1932, is as deeply revered now as it was in the days when kings were literally "Lords of Life".

In its enduring traditions, Thailand embodies a quintessential "Thainess" which indelibly colours the nation and gives the sense of an ancient land that is different. Yet the Thais miraculously combine a sincere respect for the past with zest for the new and a joy in today's innovations.

It is precisely such a seeming paradox which makes Thailand so rewarding. Here is not only, a truly multi-faceted destination of enormous cultural and topographical diversity, but also has all the modern advantages to ensure the most pleasurable travel experience. From exclusive service to superior opportunities for sightseeing, accommodation, dining and shopping, the traveller will find plenty to appreciate.

Variety is indeed the spice of life in Thailand. From the golden-spired temples of Bangkok to the majestic ruins of ancient capitals, from the tranquil charm of rural towns to the excitement of tropical beach resorts, there is no shortage of choice. No matter how many times you have visited before, there is always something fresh to discover.



Wat Arun (Temple of Dawn)



Ratchathewi District, Bangkok

Not only are the attractions rich and varied, there is also a style of holiday to suit all preferences. If, for example, all the fun and thrills of Pattaya beach resort is too much, there are the quieter seaside pleasures of Hua Hin and Cha-am, or the island resorts of Phuket and Ko Samui. Alternatively, if culture is the draw, numerous annual festivals are celebrated in traditional ways and highlight enduring customs and beliefs. Special interest activities are another option; for example, anyone can sign up to study Buddhist meditation at a temple or to learn the art of Thai cooking from an expert chef at a five-star hotel.

Nature, too, has been generous. As varied as the historical and cultural attractions is the beauty of the ever-changing landscape. You can escape to a tropical island hideaway, laze on a pristine sandy beach, go mountain biking amid high, forest-clad hills, journey up the Chao Phraya River or explore the flora and fauna of more than 60 national parks.

Bangkok: Old and New

Encapsulating Thailand's quintessential blend of old and new is Bangkok, located on the banks of the Chao Phraya River. The nation's capital since 1782, it is both a gateway and principal destination for most travellers.

Joyfully exuberant, Bangkok embraces modern development and presents an initial picture of thrusting office towers; of glittering shopping plazas; of restaurants serving Thailand's acclaimed spicy specialities, as well as virtually all other great cuisines East and West; of entertainment spots where the fare ranges from classical Thai dance to modern jazz.

Amazingly, in the midst of this dynamic modern world, Bangkok miraculously manages to preserve its cultural heritage to a marked degree. In the soaring roofs and gleaming spires of the Grand Palace and the city's many historic temples-like the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, Temple of Dawn and other evocative shrines-the visitor is presented with a picture of classical oriental wonder.



Bang Rak District, Bangkok

In addition, contained within Bangkok's monuments and sights are treasures of the nation's artistic and cultural endeavours that typify the land and the people.

The influence of the past is not limited to major monuments and it continues to colour daily life. Files of saffron-robed monks making their early morning alms round, for example, present a scene essentially unaltered by the passing of time. Today's backdrop of high-rise buildings only adds wonder to this and other traditional sights from which the city continues to draw definition.

Ultimately, it is from the people that Bangkok derives its unique flavour. Fun-loving and easy-going, the people possess a rare tolerance which imbues the city with a real sense of freedom. It may appear at times hectic, yet what finally comes across is Bangkok's good-natured acceptance of life with all its idiosyncrasies.

Thailand's "City of Angels" is, indeed, a magic place where possibilities are limited only by the imagination. You'll marvel at the glories of the past, and delight in the golden opportunities of the present.



Thai Cooking Class



Phad Thai (Thai Fried Noodles)

Delicious Dining

Dining is a further world of discovery, with Thailand offering almost endless possibilities for relishing exciting new tastes, rich in quality and choice.

Thai cuisine, so delicious and varied in its piquant tastes, is a true gastronomic art. Creativity in cooking stems partly from the Thais' love of good food, and partly from the wealth of ingredients available. The country possesses an abundance of vegetables and fruits, herbs and spices, succulent seafood and fresh farm produce, and all are wonderfully used in tempting recipes.

From Royal Thai cuisine, based on menus traditionally served at the regal banquets of old, to four very distinctive styles of regional cooking, the discovery of new and tempting dishes is almost endless. Delicious though the variety is, the essence of Thai food and what makes it a world-class culinary art is its subtlety. The key lies in the balance and harmony of a blend of hot, sweet, salty and sour flavours. Amazingly for something that tastes so good, Thai food is also highly nutritious. With its emphasis on the freshest produce, green vegetables as well as herbs, along with a fondness for fish and poultry, Thai cooking is as much a delight of the health-conscious as for the gourmet.

For the ultimate souvenir, you can learn the art of preparing Thai food at various cooking schools, both in Bangkok and other major destinations, and so take a taste of Thailand back home with you.

In addition to Thai food, other cuisines, East and West, are readily available. Independent restaurants offer between them virtually every culinary style you can think of, while top hotels pride themselves on the high standards of their speciality restaurants where superb menus are matched by impeccable service.



Thai Ingredients



Tom Yam Kung (Spicy Shrimp Soup)



Shopping Treasures

From sophisticated plazas and chic emporia to bustling bazaars and street stalls, Thailand is a shopper's paradise. Here is shopping at its best, with a huge choice of not only what to buy but also where to buy.

A nurturing environment for the creative spirit throughout the centuries, Thailand today pulses with artistic innovation. Inspired by traditional crafts, talented Thai designers are finding imaginative new applications of ancient forms and styles, transforming fabrics, gemstones, precious metals, wood, clay and synthetic materials into international-quality contemporary clothing, fashion accessories, jewellery, home-furnishings and decor items.

Of course, classic buys such as exquisite Thai silk and precious antiques remain timeless, while top international brand-name products are very much of the moment.

Running parallel with creative development has been the growth of a dazzling array of modern air-conditioned shopping plazas and malls, housing glittering department stores as well as select independent boutiques. Here, you can shop for today's buys, from designer clothes to computer discs, with complete comfort and ease.

Apart from a staggering variety of local handicrafts in a wide range of materials, from bronze to celadon pottery, Thailand also offers excellent shopping for shoes and leather goods, and men's and ladies' fashions, both custom-made and off-the-peg, with Thai silk being, of course, the favoured fabric.

Buying is only part of the fun, and just looking gives a wonderful insight into not only Thailand's fascinating range of wares, but also quintessential Thai cultural traits. For example, the concept of "sanuk", "having fun", is part and parcel of Thai life and is much in evidence in shopping.



Kaeng Massaman (Massaman Curry)



Som Tam (Spicy Papaya Salad)

Classic among Bangkok's fun shopping venues is the Weekend Market at Chatuchak Park. Occupying some 35 acres, this is truly an exciting place to shop. Such is the maze of stalls that you can wander for hours without returning to the spot you started from, nor does the variety of buys pall and the market menu runs from handicrafts and objets d'art to fabrics and clothing.

For upscale shopping, Siam Paragon and Central World Plaza are the new trendsetter. Conveniently

located in Siam Square and Ratchaprasong area, these enormous shopping complexes boasts a dazzling array of shops with designer brands, a melting pot of restaurants, and plenty of cinemas and entertainment.

And remember, that wonderful age-old tradition of bargaining is still widely practiced and, with a smile and good-natured haggling, you'll find an additional thrill to the art of shopping in Thailand.





Khon (Traditional Thai Masked Drama)

Wondrous Entertainment

From the classical to the modern, from traditional theatre to jazz music, Bangkok promises the entertainment choices to captivate all whatever the preference.

The most traditional form of Thai entertainment is dance drama, performances of which are staged at Bangkok's National Theatre while excerpts, along with folk dance forms, are featured in the cultural shows offered by various Thai restaurants.

The major style of dance is Khon, a masked drama in which the performers, all gorgeously costumed, use graceful, sinuous body and hand movements to express both emotions and actions in the telling of the Rammakian, a moral epic. Classical Thai music accompanies the mute performances, which in their kaleidoscope of colour and movement present an unforgettable spectacle.

The principle venue for concerts, ballets and other performances, by Asian and Western companies of international renown, is the Thailand Cultural Centre. Additionally, leading Bangkok hotels quite often host theatre-dinner shows staged by international performers. Nor is modern and experimental drama overlooked and while these are not regular offerings, there are frequent performances by various drama companies such as the Patravadi Theatre.

To experience life in ancient Siam and the Buddhist realms of heaven and hell, the Siam Niramit Theatre in Bangkok offers spectacular shows with 120 actors, where colourful costumes meld with incredible special effects. In addition to the 2,000-seat theatre, there's also a grand restaurant for special package tours.

Bangkok also boasts a vibrant modern art scene, and numerous galleries have constantly changing exhibitions of leading and up-and-coming contemporary Thai and other Southeast Asian artists.



Traditional Thai Puppet Show

For popular music, many bars and cocktail lounges have live bands, and in Bangkok jazz is especially popular, one of the top venues being the Bamboo Bar at the Oriental Hotel. As for movies, Bangkok has a host of excellent complexes screening the latest Thai and Western box-office hits.

Not to be missed is Muai Thai, a style of boxing unique to Thailand in which combatants use elbows, knees

and bare feet as well as gloved fists. A martial art before it was a sport, Muai Thai has a long tradition and is still surrounded by much ritual.

The fights are often fierce and furious, though the best boxers display remarkable skills, as well as great fitness, and a good match is decided by the application of techniques rather than brute force. Often as entertaining as the action in the ring is the reaction of the spectators who yell and shout encouragement to the boxers as the excitement mounts.

There are two boxing stadiums in Bangkok. Lumpini and Ratchadamnoen, and between them, they offer professional bouts every night of the week.



Rajadamnern Boxing Stadium



Rock Climbing in Krabi



Golf



Phuket Regatta

Sporting Options

The opportunities for sport and recreation in Thailand are as diverse as the land itself. Thais take their fun seriously and believe it would be a dull world if it were all work and no play.

Watersports are perhaps Thailand's biggest attraction, with perfect conditions ensured by the combination of a tropical climate and some of the world's most stunning beaches and islands. At Pattaya, Phuket, and other resort centres there are facilities for all sorts of activities to get you in, on, above, and below the water, from windsurfing to parasailing, from waterskiing to deep-sea fishing.

The fastest growing watersport, however, is scuba-diving, and numerous spots around Thailand's extensive coastline afford ideal conditions with crystal-clear water and an abundance of marine life. Yachting is also becoming increasingly attractive, with facilities for both dinghy, sailing and the chartering of larger yachts for cruising.

For those who have never undertaken these types of activities, expert tuition is available at the major resorts and in four or five days you can, for example, gain a scuba-diving proficiency certificate.

On land, golf is undoubtedly the main sporting option, with Thailand regarded as one of the world's top golfing destinations. To the enthusiast, the game is pure pleasure wherever it is played. In Thailand it is sheer paradise.

Not only does the Kingdom boast some 200 golf courses, many of them of championship standard and designed by leading names in the game, it also promises exceptional facilities and services for players and their families.

If your wish is simply for a little exercise, most leading hotels in Bangkok and the main travel destinations have tennis courts, fitness centres and, quite often, squash courts. At the other end of the activity scale, there are opportunities for extreme sports such as rock-climbing or hang-gliding.



Muay Thai



Ayutthaya Historical Park

Ancient Wonders

Thailand has a rich and fascinating past. The land has long been a cultural crossroads and many historical sites exist as testaments to the nation's evolution.

Bangkok's many Buddhist temples and the art treasures they contain are usually the first sights the traveller encounters. Wonderful though these are, few are more than 200 years old, Bangkok being founded as the Thai capital in only 1782. Further afield, however, it is possible to trace an intriguing history extending far back in time.

The area now defined by the borders of Thailand boasts civilisations dating back to prehistoric times. At Ban Chiang, in the Northeast region, for example, archaeological finds, including delicately decorated pottery, date back more than 5,000 years.

Prior to the Thai's rise to supremacy in the 13th century, much of the region was dominated by the

Khmer, whose vast empire was centred around Angkor in present-day Cambodia. The cultural legacy of this influence can be seen at a number of well-preserved Khmer monuments, notably in the North-east, which are the finest examples of their kind found outside Cambodia.

Moving into the true Thai period, dating from the 13th century, the historical development of the Kingdom can be glimpsed at several ancient sites. Reflecting past glories to the fullest are the surviving ruins of the first two capital cities: Sukhothai, founded in 1238, and Ayutthaya, which was the power centre for over 400 years until its destruction in 1767. At both places, the former, located on the northern edge of the Central Plains, and the latter, situated some 80 kilometres north of Bangkok, are impressive ruins attesting to the architectural achievements of the Thais.

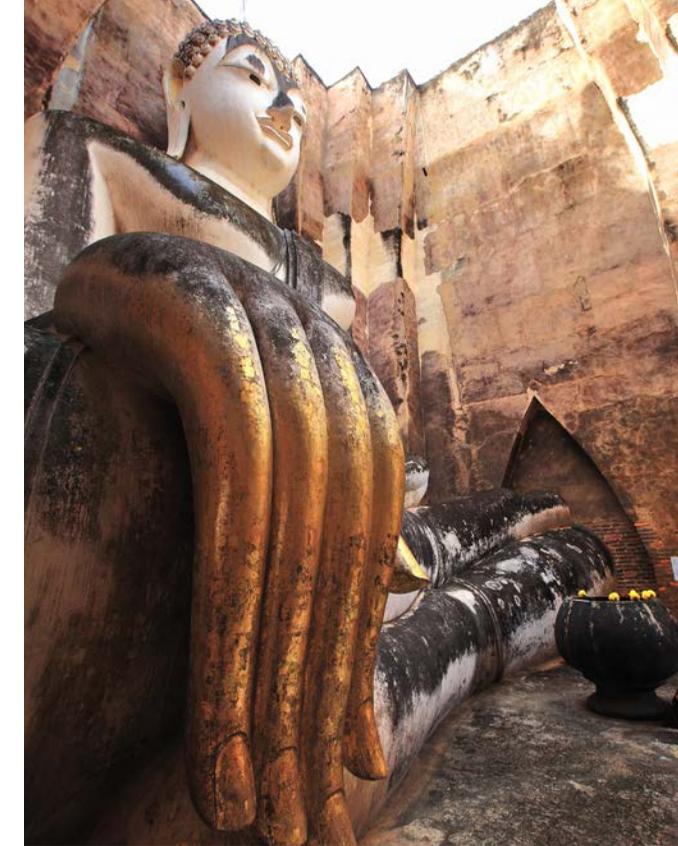
Sukhothai and Ayutthaya are two of the most well-



Suan Dok Temple, Chiang Mai

known ancient sites scattered around the country. Others range from Chiang Mai in the north, founded as the capital of the Lanna Kingdom in the late 13th century, to Nakhon Pathom, an early and important Buddhist centre lying west of modern Bangkok, to old southern cities such as Nakhon Si Thammarat.

Past glories have not vanished in the modern world, and Thailand presents myriad wonders of cultural and artistic merit.



Wat Si Chum, Sukhothai



Phanom Rung Historical Park, Buri Ram

Tropical Resorts

Providing the perfect complement to cultural sites are Thailand's superb beach resorts and tropical islands. The country has more than 2,500 kilometres of coastline, with sandy beaches, sheltered bays, quiet coves, and idyllic islands. Not only do Thailand's shores display marked topographical variety, but they also present enormous diversity in the style of seaside vacations. What remains constant is the tropical climate and almost year-round sunshine. The physical composition of the coastline varies from sandy beaches fringed with palm or casuarina trees to ruggedly beautiful limestone. The two main resort regions are the east and west coasts of the Gulf of Thailand and the deep south along both shores of the Kra Isthmus.

Just a two-hour drive southeast of Bangkok is Pattaya on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Thailand. It is a colourful and vibrant place where a complete spectrum of watersport amenities is combined with a wealth of on-land entertainment to ensure there is never a dull moment, night or day. For a different mood, the resorts of Hua Hin and Cha-am, on the

opposite side of the Gulf, are quieter for a more restful enjoyment of sun, sea and sand.

Even more spectacular are the beaches of the far South. Here, off the southwest coast, and hour's flight from Bangkok, is the island of Phuket, characterised by truly breathtaking tropical coastal scenery, unspoilt beaches of powdery white sand and the clear blue waters of the Andaman Sea, set against a backdrop of rolling hills and lush green vegetation. Matching the natural beauty are some of the finest beach resorts in the whole of Asia. Nearby, on the mainland, Krabi offers more pristine beaches backed by palm groves and surrounded by towering cliffs, while off the opposite shores of the peninsula is Ko Samui. A smaller island than Phuket, Samui nonetheless presents a whole spectrum of resort styles, from popular beaches to quiet coves.

All the top resorts offer a wide choice of watersports. Scuba-diving enthusiasts, in particular, will appreciate the rich marine life and colourful coral formations found in Thailand's coastal waters.



Phuket



Railay Beach, Krabi



Muko Similan Marine National Park, Phang-nga



Phu Lom Lo, Loei

Natural Escapes

Variety is truly the spice of life in Thailand and the natural beauty of the country is not limited to beaches and islands. Hills, mountains, forests, jungles, rivers and waterfalls are all features in picturesque landscapes which present refreshing contrasts to both the city and the beach resort. Moreover, Thailand's countryside is easily accessible.

Most popular with visitors is the hill country of the North, a region of teak forests and jungle-covered peaks where the folds of the mountains hide

secret little valleys, any one of them a contender for Shangri-La. Attractive figures in this breathtaking landscape are the colourful hilltribes, semi-nomadic people who lead independent lifestyles.

Wild and remote though some parts of the North are, you'll still find an easy path into this charming region. Chiang Mai, Thailand's second city, lies in the heart of the area and provides the perfect base to explore the surrounding countryside.

Up here is an excellent range of accommodation in all categories from deluxe to guesthouse, while travel agents operate numerous day excursions as well as mini-safaris by four-wheel drive, mountain bikes or on an elephant's back.

Nature lovers can also take pleasure in Thailand's many national parks where flora and fauna are preserved. These are found in all regions of the country and encompass various habitats. Best known is perhaps Khao Yai National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage

Site located northeast of Bangkok, which covers 542,000 acres of forest, jungle, and grassland spread over rolling hills. It is an area of magnificent natural beauty. Protected within its borders are bears, tigers, elephants, monkeys, deer and many species of birds and butterflies.

Other famous national parks are found in the North-east and in the South where, amongst others, there is the excellent marine national park of Tarutao, a group of protected islands in the Andaman Sea.



Heo Narok Waterfall, Nakhon Nayok



Tea Plantation, Chiang Rai



Exotic Spas

Some of the finest spas in the world are to be found in Thailand. Here are truly idyllic oases where you can indulge yourself with the most refreshing, most relaxing health and beauty treatments all amid exquisite surroundings.

Whether it's alongside the fabled River of Kings in Bangkok, amid the tranquillity of a classic beach resort, in the heart of the lush green hills of the North or on a tropical island paradise, spa treatments in Thailand are the last word in pampered luxury.

With such exotic settings, together with a two-thousand-year-old tradition of massage, meditation and herbal medicine, Thailand is a natural place to escape the pressures of everyday life and rejuvenate the mind and body.

Add modern luxury, stylish elegance and the very latest treatments to the wisdom of the past and you have the ideal retreat into a world that soothes, relaxes, calms and revitalises so completely, so perfectly.



At the same time as keeping abreast of modern medicine, and Bangkok offers some of the finest modern healthcare available, Thailand also preserves its traditional healing arts and time-honoured techniques to ensure physical, mental and spiritual well-being in the most natural way.

Offering both ancient Thai healing practices, including yoga and tai chi exercises, reflexology, aromatherapy and Western-style spa and beauty

treatments, the facilities range from super luxury establishments at top city and resort hotels to back-to-nature spas in traditional settings, as well as natural hot springs.

A healthy approach to life is, indeed, very much a part of Thailand's travel experience, an experience that can be contemplatively relaxing and wonderfully rejuvenating.



The Royal Ploughing Ceremony



Songkran Festival

Festive Occasions

Ultimately, it is the people who make a place what it is, and the Thais are not only hospitable, they are also fun-loving. This is readily seen in the number of annual festivals, both national and regional. Some celebrations are Buddhist and some are secular, but all are joyous, colourful occasions and typically comprise parades with fabulously decorated floats combined with music, dancing, and the fun of the fair.

Festivals are an essential part of Thai life and as such offer the visitor a valuable opportunity not only for having fun, but also for gaining an insight into various aspects of Thai culture. This is especially true in the rural areas where the year is still dictated by the agricultural cycle and times of toil are punctuated by seasonal festivals that serve as both holidays and propitious occasions.

Many festivals follow the lunar calendar and are thus moveable feasts, while others have set annual dates. There are, however, so many throughout the year that whenever you arrive in Thailand you can be pretty sure of being in time for one special occasion or another.

Of the national events, Songkran, the traditional Thai New Year on April 13th, and Loi Krathong, on the night

of the full moon in November, are the most famous. The former, these days most riotously celebrated in Chiang Mai, is a boisterous affair in which water is splashed over one and all. It is symbolic of cleansing, though most youngsters see it as just good fun.

Loi Krathong, by contrast, is a quieter more romantic event in which homage is paid to the Mother of Waters. All over the country, people gather at rivers, ponds, and lakes under the moonlight to float krathongs, small lotus-shaped offerings containing incense, a candle and a coin. It is a moving and magical sight.

Of regional celebrations, perhaps the most spectacular is the Yasothon Rocket Festival held in the Northeast in May. At this time, huge homemade rockets are fired into the air as an invocation for rain, the timely arrival of the monsoon being crucial for the rice harvest. Whether the rockets actually encourage the rain or not, no one in Yasothon misses this occasion for having a wild, joyous time before the arduous work of another agricultural season begins.

Other events, like the Royal Ploughing Ceremony held in Bangkok to predict the year's rice harvest, or the Elephant Roundup in Surin offer priceless insights into the traditions, rites and pageants that have long regulated the lives of the people.



Rocket Festival, Yasothon



Staying in Style

Thailand can claim to some of the finest hotel accommodations in the world. Indeed, some visitors come just to relax and enjoy the luxury of Bangkok's famous Oriental, often voted as the world's best hotel, or to play golf on numerous courses.

In Bangkok, you have a superb selection of hotels in all categories; some are opulent, many are luxurious, all are comfortable and everywhere you are greeted by gracious hospitality and attentive service. The Thais have a long tradition of extending a warm welcome to visitors and wherever you stay, in a large or small hotel, you'll appreciate the smiling staff who care for your needs.

While price is one deciding factor in selecting your hotel, location is also a consideration and Bangkok's deluxe properties offer variety in their rooms with a view. For example, you may prefer a garden setting that provides a green oasis in the city, or you may want to position yourself in the heart of the business, shopping and entertainment districts. Alternatively, you may like to stay at Bangkok's

historic focal point on the banks of the Chao Phraya River.

Bangkok does not have a monopoly on world-class hotels. Many fine properties are to be found in Pattaya, Phuket, Samui, Chiang Mai, Hua Hin, and at a number of other beach and inland resorts.

Even off the beaten track, every town of moderate size or larger has at least one hotel offering first-class accommodation. Inexpensive but comfortable guesthouses are also widely available.

Leading hotels in the main cities and resorts provide far more than comfortable accommodation. Fine restaurants, with various culinary specialities, are noted features as are cocktail lounges and other entertainment facilities. For the travelling executive, there are business centres with full office services and high-tech communication links. Sports facilities at most deluxe hotels include fitness centres and tennis courts in addition to swimming pools. Should you want to host a major international convention or simply a private party, that's no problem either.



Getting Around

Thailand covers an area of 514,000 square kilometres, roughly the same size as France. Bangkok is a sprawling city with a population of some ten million. Large though the nation and its capital are, you will not have any problem getting around. Transport for travelling across town or across country is equally convenient.

In Bangkok, air-conditioned taxis with metres are plentiful and can be easily hailed wherever you happen to be in the city. An alternative type of taxi is the tuk-tuk, a three-wheeled vehicle taking two passengers (three or four at a squeeze). They are rather noisy and are open to traffic fumes, though they are extremely popular with visitors who find them quaint. The fare should be negotiated in advance.

Taxis that are even more unusual, though equally convenient, are the river taxis that ply the Chao Phraya. Some are just cross-river ferries, but others serve the many piers on both banks and cover a route that goes as far as the northern suburb of Nonthaburi.

With regard to public transport, Bangkok has an elevated mass transit system, the BTS Skytrain, which offers quick and easy access along a route covering the Silom and Sukhumvit areas. Another quick and affordable way to get around the capital is on the MRT. Fares for the subway are inexpensive with many major stops near Bangkok's premier tourist attractions. Some stops like the one on Sukhumvit Road connect with the Skytrain.



Alternatively, there is a cheap and comprehensive bus service, with both air-conditioned and non air-conditioned vehicles serving every area of the city. At the other end of the transport scale, hotel limousines and car hire are readily available.

Train travel is also convenient on the main northern and southern lines, and to the northeast. Airconditioned first-class sleepers are ideal for long journeys, though there are also second- and thirdclass carriages.

The most comprehensive domestic transportation network is the government-operated long-distance bus service. There is scarcely a town in the entire country which is not served either on a direct Bangkok route or a feeder service from a provincial centre.

If you want to go your own way, there are many car hire firms in Thailand, including international rental companies such as Hertz and Avis. The road system is good and well sign-posted.

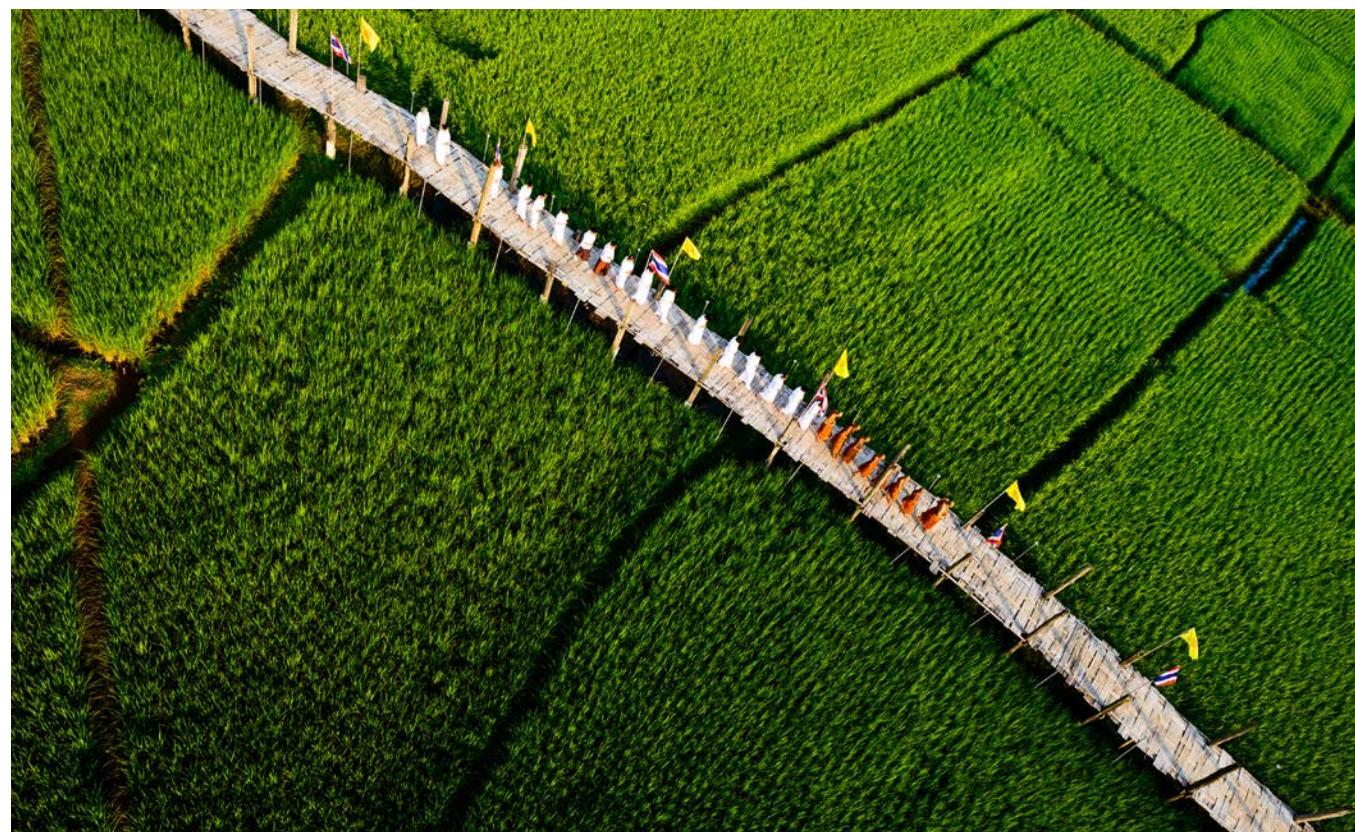


Chaiwatthanaram Temple, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya



For upcountry travel, THAI, along with several private carriers, operate flights to all major travel destinations, as well as many smaller provincial cities and towns. On popular routes, such as to Chiang Mai or Phuket, there are several flights daily.

Suvarnabhumi International Airport, located some 25 km-east-of-downtown Bangkok, is ultra-modern, superconvenient, and state-of-the-art. The old airport at Don Mueang now serves as a runway and landing strip for low-budget airlines, private jets, and chartered flights, in order to ease air-traffic congestion at the new airport in Samut Prakan province.



Su Tong Pe Bridge, Mae Hong Son



Muko Similan Marine National Park, Phang-nga

Plan Your Trip

So numerous and varied are Thailand's attractions that you cannot possibly see them all on one visit. Planning your trip requires careful consideration, and it is best to tailor an itinerary to specific interests such as the beach, in preference to national parks and the countryside.

Bangkok is the usual gateway for most travellers, and you should plan on three to five days in the capital. This allows sufficient time for seeing the major sights, taking perhaps one out-of-town day excursion (Ayutthaya or Kanchanaburi are top choices), and exploring Bangkok's dining and shopping possibilities.

If a beach vacation is your priority, Bangkok could be followed by a week at Phuket or Samui Island, which offer the most exotic settings. Should your time be limited, the resorts of Pattaya, Rayong, Cha-am and Hua Hin are closer to the capital.

For a different scene, Northern Thailand affords plenty of scope for both cultural sightseeing and refreshing escapes into the countryside. Chiang Mai is the best base for exploring the region, with a stay of three or four days a good introduction. If you have more time, overnight visits to Mae Hong Son or Chiang Rai are well worthwhile.

Travellers who already know Thailand will find the Northeastern region rewarding. The most traditional part of the country, it is best toured by car or bus. Allow five to seven days for a trip.

Thailand also provides excellent facilities for sporting vacations: golf, scuba-diving and yachting in particular. A two-week stay is long enough for general sightseeing and special interest activities.

The variations on a visit to Thailand are nearly endless, and perhaps the best advice to bear in mind when arranging your trip is to plan on coming back.



Ko Lipe, Satun



Rajaprapa Dam, Surat Thani