

Free Bangkok Guide

Personal Recommendations

by Isaac Olson

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After living in Bangkok for a number of years and showing numerous people around, these are my recommendations. There are plenty of other places to visit in Bangkok, but these destinations are ones I have actually been to, so I can attest to their quality or lack thereof. Consult the Internet for more details on each place.

**** Means it's on my personal favorites list. Find these listed first, then following destinations in alphabetical order.

This guide has three sections: Best of BKK; Maybe, Maybe not; and Skip or Avoid.

Each section has the following sub-sections: Activities; Arts & Culture; Day Trips; Food and Beverage; Night Life; Parks; Shopping; and Sites.

[See all places on Google Maps](#)

or paste this Google Maps link into your browser:

<https://mapsengine.google.com/map/edit?mid=zIUhn38PaO3c.kUp8pgaEr0lc>

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Best of BKK

Activities

****Chao Praya River Express Boat

A great way to get to sites located in and around the Grand Palace in the old part of the city, this boat is worth the ride itself. It cruises up the river past temples and plenty of interesting river traffic. The easiest place to catch the boat is at Central Pier next to Saphan Taksin BTS/Skytrain Stn, but it stops at many piers along the river. It ceases operation at about 6:30 at night or when it’s too dark

[Route Map](#)

Lady Boy Show (Cabaret)

This is a one of a kind experience in Bangkok. There are a few famous shows such as **Calypso and Mambo**, but they are often not worth the price (find them pegged under Maybe, Maybe Not on [the map](#)) Although, if you book tickets for Calypso Cabaret online two days ahead, then it’s significantly cheaper. Calypso and Mambo are rated PG. To see a free lady boy show, go to the area around Silom Soi 4 off Sala Daeng BTS/Skytrain Stn. The area between Surawong Soi 58 and Rama IV Rd is where you’ll find the most shows. There is a not so discreet walking street with plenty of advertisements for “boys” between a Family Mart and a Leather goods store.

Massages and Pampering

Thai massage and other forms of pampering such as facials and manicures are widely available. A one hour Thai massage should cost 150-250 baht with a standard foot massage costing about the same price, but expect to pay more in hi-so and touristy places. Manicures and facials are more expensive, as are non-Thai massages.

Thai BBQ

Cook raw meat and vegetables on a grill over hot coals right at your table, and if you go to the right place it's only 99 baht for the buffet. Unsurprisingly, it's popular among students.

Thai Boxing

A number of stadiums exist, but foreigners have to pay an outrageous amount of money at Lumpini Boxing Stadium. On Sundays, near Chatuchak Weekend Market, you can see Thai boxing for free at Color Channel 7 TV studio. Arrive at 12:30 to get good seats, and fights begin at 1:30. The studio is located about 300 meters from Mo Chit BTS/Skytrain Stn, down Ruam Siri Mit Road.

Arts & Culture

****Apex Scala

A classic movie theater doing things the old-fashioned way. A surprising number of films are crammed onto this theater's one screen. Comfortable seats with cheap popcorn and classic ushers greet you at this movie house, not to mention an interior reminiscent of the golden age of cinema. Tickets are only 100 baht.

****House cinema

Bangkok's only boutique cinema showing unique movies from around the world for only 100 baht. It's located next to RCA off Phetchaburi Road at the top floor of a mall called RCA Plaza. Get there by taxi from Phetchaburi MRT/Subway Stn or by Ramkhamhaeng Airport Rail Link Stn. The theater also has a decent Thai restaurant.

Bangkok Arts and Culture Center

This place features a great deal of modern art with ever-changing exhibits. Get off at National Stadium BTS/Skytrain Stn or Hua Chang Pier on the Khlong Saen Saep canal boat.

Day Trips

****Amphawa Floating Market

Most people consider this the best floating market. It's located about an hour outside of Bangkok. Vans to the market run from Victory Monument and make the return trip as well. Take the boat tour for 50 baht and you will be whisked around to nearby temples with their own markets on the river. If you are there at night you can also take a boat tour to see fireflies. Without the boat tour, it can be more or less just a crowded and touristy river market.

****Ayutthaya

This island city is the former capital of the previous Thai kingdom to rule most of the area we now call Thailand. Despite the fact that it was sacked by the Burmese in 1767, there are still quite a few standing ruins of palaces and temples. A few have been restored and at least one historic temple is still functioning (Wat Yai Chai Mongkon). All the major sites are within the Ayutthaya Historical Park, which charges entrance fees for popular sites. Most of the ruins are on the central and western part of the island, but some great sites are also off the island. The best way to see Ayutthaya is to get a tourist map and rent a bicycle, but if you're feeling lazy, you can hire a tuk tuk for about 600-700 baht to take you around to all the major sites in a few hours. It is also recommended that you take a boat tour to the sites around the rivers and the canals because when the temples were built, they were intended to be viewed from these waterways. The only must-see sites are Wat Phra Sri Sanphet, Wat Mahathat, and Wat Chai Wattanaram at sunset. It will take 1.5 to 2 hours to get to Ayutthaya. You can take a van from Victory Monument, a bus at the Northern Bus Terminal (AKA: Mo Chit Stn), or a train from Hua Lamphong or Bang Sue Railway Stns.

****Local Train to Samut Sakhon and Samut Songkhram

This is a slow but great way to get to Amphawa Floating Market. It's about a 2.5 to 3 hour trip one way. Take the local train from Wongwian Yai Railway Stn in Thonburi (west river). The train ends at Samut Sakhon (Mahachai Railway Stn), where you have to get off then take a ferry across the river, find the nearby train station (Ban Laem Railway Stn), and take the train to Samut Songkhram. Along the way the old train bounces about while going along the coast past rice and sea salt fields. At the end of the line in Samut Songkhram (Mae Khlong Railway Stn), there is a market called Mae Klong Market which is set up over the actual railroad tracks! When trains come in, the vendors pull their booths back to let the train through. From here, you can take a taxi or Seongtaw (pickup truck with seats) to Amphawa Floating Market.

Phutthamonthon (Buddha Monthon)

A huge Buddha park located about 30 minutes outside of the city center off Borommaratchachonnani Road. The center of the park has a giant striding Buddha and next to a lake is a temple with the entire Buddhist canon engraved on marble tablets. This park is also where the Thai Buddhist Sangka sits, which is more or less the Vatican of Thai Buddhism. There are several Buddhist museums there as well and many ceremonies happen in the park. Generally, it's just a good place to relax outside of the busy urban center of Bangkok. The only way to get there is by taxi or local bus. It's not really a day trip, but it's further from the city center than most visitors ever wander.

Food & Beverage

Thai food can be found everywhere of course and at most places it's quite good, but beware of non-hygienic street food. Most recommendations below serve foreign food, since finding quality international food is much more of a challenge.

****Bamboo

Great Middle Eastern food with Shisha (Hookah) smoking available. It's on Sukhumvit Soi 3/Soi Nana about 200 meters up the Soi from Sukhumvit Road. Closest to Nana BTS/Skytrain Stn.

****Café de Norasingha

This coffee shop serves up coffee and tea along with other treats in a historic palace setting. It's located at Phaya Thai Palace next to Phra Mongkut Klao Hospital on Rat Withi Road. From Victory Monument BTS/Skytrain Stn, it's about 700 meters.

****Mae Kaidee's

Here we have a vegan restaurant off Kao San Road serving up amazing and innovative Thai dishes. It's located in the alley behind Burger King off Tanao Road at the end of Kao San Road. There is another location north of the canal and Phra Athit Road on Samsen Road near Soi 1.

Bei Otto

Here you can indulge in German food more authentic than you can often find in Germany itself. Cheap by European standards, but somewhat pricey by Thai standards. I recommend one of the German sausage plates such as the nurnberger bratwurst. This place is only about 100 meters up Sukhumvit Soi 20 and 400 meters from Asok BTS/Skytrain Stn or Sukhumvit MRT/Subway Stn.

Fatty's Bar and Diner

The name says it all. This is a Midwestern American bar serving up some of the fattest burgers, sandwiches, and hot dogs in the city. The food, even with its artery clogging properties, is delicious and authentic. Many evenings feature unique shows by local foreign bands and other performance artists such as comedians. The American proprietor is a cross between a small town Wisconsin cheese-head and a hippy. Fatty's is located down Rama 9 Road about 750 meters from Rama 9 MRT/Subway Stn towards Din Daeng. It's located on the right (north) side of the road right next to an overpass road.

Hajime Robot Restaurant

Get a taste of Japan in Bangkok. This restaurant has a former automotive robot dressed in a samurai costume that serves your food. You can choose between all-you-can-eat BBQ or hot pot (broth with meat and veggies). You cook your own food at the table. Your all-you-can-eat time is limited and you order on a touch screen. The price is about 550 baht per person. The only way to get to the restaurant is to transfer to the BRT/Express Bus at Sala Daeng BTS/Skytrain Stn. Get off the BRT at Nara-Rama III or Wat Darn BRT/Express Bus Stns, and then take a taxi. The taxi should cost about 50 baht, and you should have the restaurant's phone number on hand, so the taxi driver can call and ask for directions. The restaurant sits on Industrial Ring Road leading up to the Bhumibhol/Industrial Bridge in a small shopping center.

Mont

A unique place to get a Thai interpretation of western food. This dessert stop is very famous among Thais for serving up toast slathered in margarine and covered in an array of flavored puddings/custards (chocolate, pandanus, custard, vanilla, corn, peanut butter, sweet condensed milk, etc.). This place is supposed to have invented this toasty desert. You can also buy sweet milk and steamed bread to dip in sweet sauces. Most is located about 250 meters from Democracy Monument down Dinso Road on the right hand (west) side.

Mr. Sia

This is a nondescript but excellent Thai-Chinese fusion restaurant with dim sum and more. The cook and proprietor is a trained chef. To find this place, get off at Chong Nongsi BTS/Skytrain Stn and transfer to the BRT/Express Bus. Then, get off at Chan Road BRT/Express Bus Stn. From here, you can take a taxi. The restaurant is located next to Sathu Pradit Soi 12 on the west side of the Road and has a plastic chef above the sign.

Pizzeria Limoncello

Italian restaurants are ubiquitous up and down Sukhumvit Road, all offering varying quality food. Limoncello's speciality is pizza, and they serve it up Italian style at reasonable prices. Find this pie shop about 400 meters up Sukhumvit Soi 11 behind Zaks Wine Pub and closest to Nana BTS/Skytrain Stn.

There are many other excellent Italian restaurants. Other notable mentions in the Italian field are: Pizzeria da Luigi, L'Opera Italian Restaurant, Pizzeria Bella Napoli, and Big Mama Pizzeria.

Red Snapper

Here you'll find a small western fish and chips shop on the roof of the proprietor's house. The owner is a very boisterous and friendly Thai man who formerly lived abroad. Very reasonable prices for quality food and drink, along with a nice rooftop full of plants on a quiet street. Get there from Sala Daeng BTS/Skytrain Stn by walking down Convent Road for about 300 meters, then turn right onto Phiphat Soi 2 and walk about 200 meters until you see a small sign with a fish on it on the right hand (north) side.

Shoshana

Authentic Israeli food with amazing falafel. It's located next to Kao San Road on Chakrabpongse Road down a small alley.

Tawandang

This is a large restaurant and microbrewery offering kitschy Asian theatrical entertainment. Self-described as a “German Brewery” most people would be at a loss to find what’s really German about it. The entertainment includes Thai comedy, singing of Thai and western songs, acrobatics, and other acts that just leave you scratching your head wondering what the hell just happened (especially after a number of beers). Booking ahead is necessary on the weekend especially. From Chong Nonsi BTS/Skytrain Stn, transfer to the BRT/Express Bus and get off at Nara-Rama III Stn.

Terminal 21 cafeteria

Clean, cheap, accessible, and full of nearly every kind of Thai food, the cafeteria at the top of this shopping center is worth a feed. Some tables even provide views. Remember to swap your cash for a plastic card and to redeem your remaining cash before you leave. Enter Terminal 21 from Asok BTS/Skytrain Stn or Sukumvit MRT/Subway Stn, then go nearly to the top and all the way to the back of the mall.

Cafeterias are usually great places to try a variety of Thai food. Every mall and shopping center has one somewhere, usually on the top floor. Other great cafeterias can be found at: Central World (hidden behind the grocery store), Amarin Plaza, Central Chidlom (eclectic mix of Thai and foreign foods), and Siam Center (recently renovated).

Night Life

****Chao Phraya River Dinner Cruise

A night time dinner cruise along the Chao Phraya River is probably the best and most comfortable way to see all the splendor of Bangkok. This is due to the fact that sites are lit up at night, allowing them to stand out more than in the day time. The boats depart from different locations but take about the same route along one length of the river. Many boats depart from the River City shopping center’s pier. Hunt online for rates and bargains. Prices range from 500 to 2,500 baht.

****Flower Market (Pak Khlong Talat), Memorial Bridge (Saphan Phut) and Night Market

The Flower Market is not to be missed and is most lively at the latest times of the night/week hours of the morning. Piles of amazingly cheap exotic flowers await visitors along with a mass of people sorting and arranging the delicate plants. Close to the Flower Market is Memorial Bridge. This industrial looking truss bridge is one of the oldest in Bangkok and features a walkway offering nice views of Wat Arun and the Chao Praya River. Young people like to hang out at the bridge and visit the local market next to it. The market sells random trendy merchandise such as clothing.

Sky Bars

Before going to any open air sky bar, call ahead to ensure that they are open because they will close due to rain.

****- *Vertigo*: Located on top of the Banyan Tree hotel, this bar offers amazing 360 degree views. The cheapest drink is 300 baht and the dress code is enforced. Weekends are often busy, but this means you might be able to sneak the view without buying a drink. It's located on Sathorn Road about 300 meters from Lumpini MRT/Subway Stn or 1 kilometer from Sala Daeng BTS/Skytrain Stn.

****- *Millennium Hilton*: This bar is enclosed and offers 360 degree views. Its location on the Chao Praya River allows for nice views up and down the river and even sites such as the Grand Palace and Golden Mount (if you can spot them). The cheapest drink is 280 baht and the dress code is enforced. Also expect a lounge singer to be performing in the background. It's located on the Thonburi (west) side of the river. You can get off at Saphan Taksin or Thonburi BTS/Skytrain Stns. After getting off the Skytrain, then you can take a taxi or if at Saphan Taksin, you can go down to Central Pier and wait for the Millennium Hilton boat.

- *State Tower*: This famous sky bar and restaurant is usually packed, but this means you can be sneaky and get by without buying one of their insanely expensive 500 baht drinks. Technically there is a dress code but it is laxly enforced. The State Tower is a huge neoclassical esque building located on Charoen Krung Road about 500 meters from Saphan Taksin BTS/Skytrain Stn.

- *Balco*: This is a nice laid back outdoor bar with a pool table on the roof of River City shopping center. It's not on top of one of the tallest buildings, but you can watch the traffic on the Chao Praya River, and drinks are reasonably priced. Next to the bar is a Thai BBQ restaurant, which I would recommend trying. To get to Balco, take the Chao Praya River Express Boat to Si Phraya/N3 Pier or take a taxi from Saphan Taksin BTS/Skytrain Stn.

****Train Market (Talot Rot Fai)

(see Shopping section)

Asiatique

(see Shopping section)

Tawandang

(see Food and Beverage section)

Parks

****Lumphini Park

The most popular park in Bangkok, this huge space has a lake with boats to rent, many pavilions, and walking paths. There are also plenty of giant monitor lizards lumbering about in the grass and in the water. You might also see public mass aerobics, a distinctly Asian activity. Lumphini Park can be accessed from either Lumphini or Silom MRT/Subway Stns or it's a short walk from Sala Daeng BTS/Skytrain Stn.

****Phrapadaeng

Probably the best place to bike in all of Bangkok. It's technically not a park, but a traditional agricultural area located across the Chao Praya River where people live, and is known as the lungs of Bangkok. You can rent a bike and cruise around on the roads and elevated walkways through fruit orchards. There's also a local market open on weekends selling snacks, crafts, and agricultural products. One of the more unique places to visit is the Siamese Fighting Fish Museum. To get to Phrapadaeng, you can take a ferry from next to Wat Khlong Toei at the Port of Bangkok. The Port of Bangkok is located about one kilometer from Klong Toei MRT/Subway Stn down Kasem Rat Road.

****Rot Fai, Chatuchak, and Queen Sirikit Parks

Here you'll find three parks all in one area and next to a huge outdoor market. Chatuchak Park is right next to Chatuchak Weekend Market. If you walk up Chatuchak Park away from the market, then you can cross the road over to Queen Sirikit Park which is full of beautifully manicured gardens and a giant musical fountain. North of Queen Sirikit Park is Rot Fai Park, which is for bicycle riding. Bikes can be rented to cruise around this former golf course. Kayaks can also be taken out on a lake and there is a restaurant and butterfly conservatory in the park. Phahon Yothin MRT/Subway Stn is the closest to Rot Fai Park, but you can get to the other parks from Mo Chit BTS/Skytrain Stn or Chatuchak Park MRT/Subway Stn.

Shopping

Pratunam Area

This is a street market combined with several huge shopping centers full of small vendors. Very cheap clothing can be grabbed up and Pantip Plaza is close by. It's located about 700 meters from Rachathewi BTS/Skytrain Stn, but closest to Pratunam Pier on the Klang Saen Saep canal boat. The area runs along Phetchaburi Road.

****- *Prantip Plaza*: Six floors of every electronics item you could imagine with other random things mixed in. It's especially good for computers. Prantip Plaza is located about 700 meters from Rachathewi BTS/Skytrain Stn.

****Train Market (Talot Rot Fai)

Once a popular and hip night market only open on weekends, this market is in the process of relocating. It features trendy items and plenty of real and faux antiques. It was formerly a 450 meter walk from Kamphaeng Phet MRT/Subway Stn on Kamphaeng Phet Road.

Asiatique the Riverfront

Very unique night market for Asia. The market is built around some brick warehouses on old Danish port facilities located on the Chao Praya River. It's full of many small shops and a number of restaurants and a food court. It also has the famous Calypso Cabaret, which is a PG rated lady boy show. On site, there is a giant Ferris wheel with short rides but in air-conditioned capsules. At some point the famous Joe Louis Puppet Theater is supposed to locate there to show off its traditional Thai puppetry. This is a night market open from 5:00 pm to midnight. To get to Asiatique, go to Saphan Taksin BTS/Skytrain Stn, then walk down to the Central Pier. From the pier, there is an Asiatique boat which takes people directly to the market.

Chatuchak Weekend Market

Only open on Saturday and Sunday this could very well be the world's largest outdoor market. It's a maze of small shops. Most of the vendors between Mo Chit BTS/Skytrain Stn and Kamphaeng Phet MRT/Subway Stn sell clothing. Further from the stations you can find houseware, pets, furniture, trinkets, and on and on. Maps of the market are available, but if you see something you want to buy, you should probably buy it right away because it's unlikely that you will ever find the shop again. It's easy to find from Mo Chit BTS/Skytrain Stn or Kamphaeng Phet MRT/Subway Stns because you just follow the crowds.

Siam Square Area

The area between Chit Lom and National Stadium BTS/Skytrain Stns and centered around Siam Square BTS/Skytrain Stn is full of large and small shopping centers. Siam Square itself has many small shops along with a few medium sized malls. The area with the small shops is located across the road from Siam Paragon.

- *Central World*: One of the largest single shopping centers in Southeast Asia. This mall has hundreds of stores, a huge multiplex movie theater, grocery store, food court, and numerous restaurants. Despite its inclusion under the Best of BKK section, it's really a Maybe, Maybe Not destination. It's located off the sky bridge between Siam Square and Chit Lom BTS/Skytrain Stns.
- *Siam Paragon*: Here you'll find a huge hi-so shopping mall with a department store, shops, restaurants, food court, grocery store, movie theater (with IMAX, 3D, and 4D theaters), bowling alley, super cars, book stores, and just about everything in between. Get off at Siam Square BTS/Skytrain Stn.

Terminal 21

This is a giant mall with floors themed after cities or countries from around the world. It consists of mostly small shops and has one of the best food courts in Bangkok. Connected to Asok BTS/Skytrain Stn.

Sites

****Temple of Dawn (Wat Arun)

Probably the most unique looking temple in Bangkok. It's located on the Thonburi (west) side of the Chao Praya River. There are great views when you climb to the top of the temple on its precariously steep steps. Take a ferry across the river from near Wat Pho (reclining Buddha) at Tha Thien/N8 Pier.

Golden Mount (Wat Saket)

This is a temple made on an artificial hill. You can walk to the top and enjoy views of Bangkok. It's located near the first/last stop (Pier Phanfa) on the Klang Saen Saep canal boat. It's not far from Democracy Monument.

Temple of the Reclining Buddha (Wat Pho)

This is where the famous giant reclining Buddha is located. It can be crowded in the high season, but the classic photo probably still makes a visit worthwhile. It's great to combine a visit to Wat Pho with a visit to Wat Arun (Temple of Dawn), which is a quick ferry ride across the river.

Turtle Temple (Wat Prayun/Wat Rua Lek)

Here you can find a charming small temple with a pond full of turtles that you can feed. Shrines tucked away in coves, surround the pond, making it a fun place to explore. Find this temple at the foot of Memorial Bridge (Saphan Phut) on the Thonburi (West) side. Look for the tall white chedi (tower).

Maybe, Maybe Not

These places might interest you, but are sometimes over rated. If you miss them, it's probably not a big deal.

Activities

Canal Boat (Klang Boat)

This boat runs up the Klang Saen Saep Canal, which is incredibly dirty, but an experience nonetheless. It's a great way to get to Pratunam, MBK, the Bangkok Arts and Culture Center, and Jim Thompson's House.

Arts and Culture

Neilson Hays Library

Built in 1922 to house English language books. This neoclassical building still retains its charm as a functioning library with a small art gallery and a quaint garden café attached. A traditional card catalogue is still in use. The library is located on Surawong Road about 1 kilometer from Chong Nonsi BTS/Skytrain Stn or about 1.4 kilometers from Sala Daeng BTS/Skytrain Stn.

Jim Thompson's House

(see the Sites section)

Day Trips

Bang Pa-In Royal Palace

This royal getaway is rarely used these days, but it might be worth a wander to see the odd collection of buildings representing a variety of styles and cultural fusions. Most of the buildings were constructed in the late 19th century and often with a European sensibility, but Chinese influences and Thai adaptations are present. Don't miss Wat Niwet Thamaprawat across the river from the palace, which you get to by taking an adventurous cable car over the river. The most prominent thing to see here is a Buddhist temple built in the style of a gothic Christian church. Get to the palace by taking a local bus from the Northern Bus Terminal (AKA: Mo Chit Stn) in Bangkok or a train from Hua Lamphong or Bang Sue Railway Stns. Trains will take at least 1.5 hours and are only several times a day. The local bus will take at least 2 hours. You can also get there by hiring a tuk tuk from Ayutthaya. It is possible to combine Bang Pa-In with a day trip to Ayutthaya, but you should get up early.

Food & Beverage

Cabbages and Condoms

A restaurant famous for its proceeds going to rural livelihood and development in Thailand. The food is decent, but overpriced and the service is slow. Seating is available inside or outside and the gift shop has a number of very unique souvenirs promoting safe sex. Located down Sukhumvit Soi 12, it's about 300 meters from Asok BTS/Skytrain Stn or Sukhumvit MRT/Subway Stn.

Night Life

Kao San Road

The most famous backpacker haunt in all of Thailand. This road is most fun for watching the drunk, bizarrely dressed tourists stumble around looking bewildered and the Thais (or often other Asian nationalities) who try to entertain them and get them to buy useless junk. There are many bars, much street food, and a few clubs. For a little more laid back atmosphere, head to Soi Ram Bhuttri, which is right next to Kao San Road. In the day time, there is a lot of backpacker oriented merchandise for sale. The best way to get to Khao San Road is to take the Chao Phraya River Express Boat and get off at Phra Athit/N13 Pier. From there, it's about a 200 meter walk. You can also take a taxi from National Stadium BTS/Skytrain Stn, but traffic can be horrendous at certain times of day.

RCA

Royal City Avenue is a major club street catering mostly to high-so customers. There are a number of smaller bars and restaurants at the ends of the street though. Get to RCA by a short taxi ride from Rama 9 MRT/Subway Stn. It can also be reached from Phetchaburi MRT/Subway Stn or Ramkhamhaeng Airport Rail Link Stn.

Silom Soi 4 area

This is the most famous gay district in Bangkok. Most people, gay, straight, or couples feel comfortable in this area. It's close to the infamous red light district of Pat Pong, which is famous for its depressing and downright disturbing "ping pong show." Several bars feature lady boy shows. However, the scene is exclusively dominated by gay men. The area between Surawong Soi 58 and Rama IV Rd is where the gay club scene really gets thumping. Most of the gay bars and clubs are located on a walking street with plenty of advertisements for "boys" between a Family Mart and a Leather goods store. The whole area is closest to Sala Daeng BTS/Skytrain Stn and near Silom MRT/Subway Stn. However, the thumping gay scene between Surawong Soi 58 and Rama IV Rd is also within walking distance of Sam Yan MRT/Subway Stn.

Sukhumvit

Sukhumvit Road is popular amongst expats and rich locals. Every Soi (side street) has something to offer.

-Nana Plaza: One of the most famous red light districts. This is a building with an open courtyard featuring level after level of nudy bars, strip clubs, and everything in between to please pervy lonely souls and the curious alike. The game here is the same as every red light district. Women give customers attention so they will buy more drinks or other services on offer. It's often just as entertaining to watch the male clients' behavior as it is the working girls. Nana Plaza is directly across from Sukhumvit Soi 3/Nana just a few meters down Sukumvit Soi 4/Nana Tai. It's about halfway between Ploen Chit and Nana BTS/Skytrain Stns.

-Soi 11: This Soi has tons of clubs and bars which are popular among the diverse Bangkok expat community. For cheap drinks, buy from a street bar which are sometimes served out of converted VW Minibuses. One nice and popular roof top bar is Nest, which stays open even in the rain due to a retractable covering. Soi 11 is next to Nana BTS/Skytrain Stn.

-Soi Cowboy: Possibly the most famous red light district in Bangkok. Every establishment features naked women dancing with numbers on them. They try to talk with patrons and get them to buy drinks and take them home. It's worth a walk down the street just to see, and it's up to you whether you want to go inside any place. Drink prices are higher than average. The small Soi is located next to Silom MRT/Subway Stn and about 100 meters from Asok BTS/Skytrain Stn. It's between Sukhumvit Soi 23 and the very wide Ratchadaphisek Road.

-Soi 22: A bit of an odd Soi full of small bars with famous Bangkok bar girls who try to get you to buy them a drink and maybe take them home later. Most bars are located on small side streets coming off the Soi. Just walk around and explore. No nudity, but plenty of middle aged foreign men hanging around. Soi 22 is located about 500 meters from Phrom Pong BTS/Skytrain Stn.

Thong Lo

A high-so destination between Sukhumvit and Petchburi Roads. There are plenty of unique and trendy restaurants, bars, and night clubs catering to the Thai elite and anyone else who can afford it. However, not all places are absurdly priced. Get to Thong Lo from Thong Lo BTS/Skytrain Stn or even from Ramkhamhaeng Airport Rail Link Stn.

Junk Market

(see the Shopping section)

Parks

Santichai Prakan Park

If you need to escape the chaos that is Kao San Road, head over to this park, which is located on the river front. It features a fort and a nice pagoda. Just 200 meters from Phra Athit/N12 Pier on the Chao Praya River Express Boat and located off Phra Athit Road where the road begins to curve.

Saranrom Park

In the old city and close to lots of sites, this small park is a nice escape. It features ponds and miniatures of Thai traditional houses. It really gets lively after working hours when locals utilize the space for jogging, aerobics, and ping pong. Next to the Grand Palace and Wat Pho across Sanam Chai Rd., this park is easy to find. Located 500 meters from Tha Thien/N8 Pier on the Chao Praya River Express Boat.

Tae Chio Cemetery

Here you will find an old Chinese cemetery which functions more as a park these days. Walking through it and looking at the many graves in the middle of an urban jungle is a slightly odd but peaceful experience. Joggers dig it too. It's 750 meters from Surasak BTS/Skytrain Stn. Turn down Charoen Rat Road, then go down Charoen Rat Soi 3 until you see a traditional gate.

Shopping

Junk Market

If this market has a name, I don't know what it is. You'll find a random assortment of stuff that often looks like it's been picked out of the garbage. I've found used jars, cell phones, and old school gaming consoles here amongst a lot of other random stuff. There are stalls selling new stuff too. This market is just across diagonally from the Grand Palace and next to the grassy mall known as Sanam Luang. It's also about 500 meters south of Kao San Road and runs along Pop Krung Canal.

MBK

Once on my skip or avoid list, this place has grown on me due to some great bargains that I've found. It's a discount shopping center popular amongst tourists. Some vendors can be rude, but with bargaining deals can be found, especially on cell phones and clothing. Connected to National Stadium BTS/Skytrain Stn.

Central World

(see the Shopping section under the Best of BKK, but it's actually a Maybe, Maybe Not destination)

Sites

Jim Thompson's House

Not a bad place to visit, since it's nice to see a compilation of traditional Thai houses. Also, the café is located in a picturesque setting and there is an art gallery with constantly changing exhibits located on site. Get there by walking about 400 meters from National Stadium BTS/Skytrain Stn or from Hua Chang Pier on the Khlong Saen Saep canal boat.

Hindu Temple (Wat Prasri Maha Umathevi/Wat Khaek)

If you've never seen a Hindu temple, then here is your chance. Not particularly big, but this is the most famous Hindu Temple in Bangkok. Plenty of Indian businesses, especially tailors, have congregated nearby. You can find this temple on the corner of Silom and Pan Roads about 800 meters from Chong Nonsi BTS/Skytrain Stn.

Skip or Avoid

Chinatown

Nearly every city in the world has a Chinatown and there is this err, country called... China. So, why visit Chinatown in Bangkok? It's overcrowded, full of traffic, a maze, and insanely hot due to all the concrete. Unless you're just hunkering for Chinese food, which can be found all over Bangkok, or you really want to support the cruel practice of shark finning, then you can miss this place altogether. On the other hand, it's worth a visit during the night time festivities for Lunar New Year. The Temple of the Golden Buddha (Wat Tramit) is quite nice, especially on a holiday. Reach Chinatown and Wat Tramit by walking towards the river from Hua Lamphong MRT/Subway Stn for about 350 meters.

City Pillar Shrine

Even if you're just walking right by, you probably don't even need to consider going out of your way to see it. It's basically just a golden phallus in a temple crammed full of Thai people doing inexplicable worshipping activities. If you must see this sacred golden cock, then it's just across from the Grand Palace and diagonal from Sanam Luang grassy mall off Ratchadamnoen Chai Rd.

Grand Palace and Wat Phra Kaow

Considered a must see by nearly every visitor to Bangkok, this site can actually be skipped. The palace itself is a descent architectural site, but with an outrageous 500 baht entry fee, a strict dress code, and hordes of tourists, this place can be crossed off your list. The tour guides are generally lousy and get half their information incorrect, and you can only peak inside a few buildings. In reality, unless you are obsessed with the intricacies of Thai architecture, you can see plenty of similar looking temples in the area. If you insist on visiting, you can get there by taking the Chao Praya River Express boat to Tha Chang/N9 Pier. Never believe anyone who tells you it is closed, no matter how friendly and well dressed they are.

Patpong

Famous for the "ping pong show", Patpong is on the low end of the flesh trade in Bangkok. Like carnival barkers, a hoard of men try to sell sex shows to tourists. These shows are bizarre to the say the least and more than a little depressing. As a woman well past her prime as a sex worker shoots darts out of her vagina in front of a picture of the Thai king and then her child (or maybe even grandchild) walks in the room, you don't know if you'll ever live down the shame contributing to that enterprise. Plus, the establishment managers (so called "mama sans") are more than happy to make you empty your wallet before you leave using the threat of their hired thugs. Oddly, Patpong does have a decent souvenir market though. Located near Sala Daeng BTS/Skytrain Stn.

Tuk Tuks

Particularly around the historic sites in the old city, Kao San Road, and Chinatown, tuk tuks run schemes to try and rip tourists off. They offer a very low price, but then instead of taking you to your destination take you to a series of shops selling jewelry, tailored clothing, or trips. Since you have to negotiate the price, they generally try to charge tourists insanely overpriced rates if they are not running a shop visiting scam. Unless you know how much to pay, you're better off avoiding them and taking a metered taxi. The novelty of riding in the open air soon wears off in a tuk tuk when you are stuck behind a diesel bus and you realize that you actually can't see anything out of the vehicle due to its low roof.

[See all places on Google Maps](#)

or paste this Google Maps link into your browser:

<https://mapsengine.google.com/map/edit?mid=zIUhn38PaO3c.kUp8pgaEr0lc>

Note from the author:

This guide reflects my personal recommendations, therefore, it is deliberately influenced by my own likes and dislikes. It is not intended to be a comprehensive or general guide to the whole of Bangkok. There are of course many great places that have been left out of this guide that I simply have never been. In particular, the Arts and Culture category is a bit lacking, and the Food and Beverage category could easily go on and on. For the restaurants listed, I have been to them multiple times so can attest to their consistent quality of food and/or experience. To keep this guide relatively concise and simple to use some quality restaurants were excluded. For example, there are quite a few excellent Italian restaurants, but I chose to list only the one I felt had consistently been the best. I am generally not a big fan of Indian food, hence, none of those restaurants made the list. But I am a fan of Middle Eastern food which is why two restaurants from that category made it into the guide. Some might be a bit crestfallen with some of the things in my Skip or Avoid section, but those are my opinions and I'm sticking to them.

This guide began when I was helping out with the hosting of a group of American exchange students to the university where I work. I decided to expand it, allowing me to have something to give out to visiting friends who would always ask for my recommendations anyway.

About Isaac:

Isaac Olson has lived in Bangkok for nearly five years. He originally came to the city to study for his master's degree in Southeast Asian studies, which he completed in 2010. He stayed on in Bangkok working at a variety of jobs for international organizations, language schools, and universities. He's admittedly not a huge fan of night life or shopping, but enjoys the outdoors, sites, and unique cultural experiences. He admits that like most expats his Thai could be better, but he has been slowly working his skills up, and can... shockingly... read and write in Thai and even carry on meaningless conversations with taxi drivers.