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PORT EXPLORER



BANGKOK KLONG TOEY THAILAND

Thailand, formerly known as Siam, is more than just another country. Literally translated, Thailand (Muan Thai) means “Land of the Free.” A predominantly Buddhist Kingdom, Thailand borders Myanmar (Burma) to the west, Laos to the north, Kampuchea (Cambodia) to the east and Malaysia to the south. Thailand is home to more than 60 million people. Once called Krung Thep or the “City of Angles,” Bangkok is the capital and largest city in Thailand with a population of over 8 million. Established in 1782 by the first king of the Chakri Dynasty (Rama I), Bangkok is Thailand’s fourth capital and was carefully laid out to resemble the former capital of Ayuthaya some 50 miles (80 km) away.

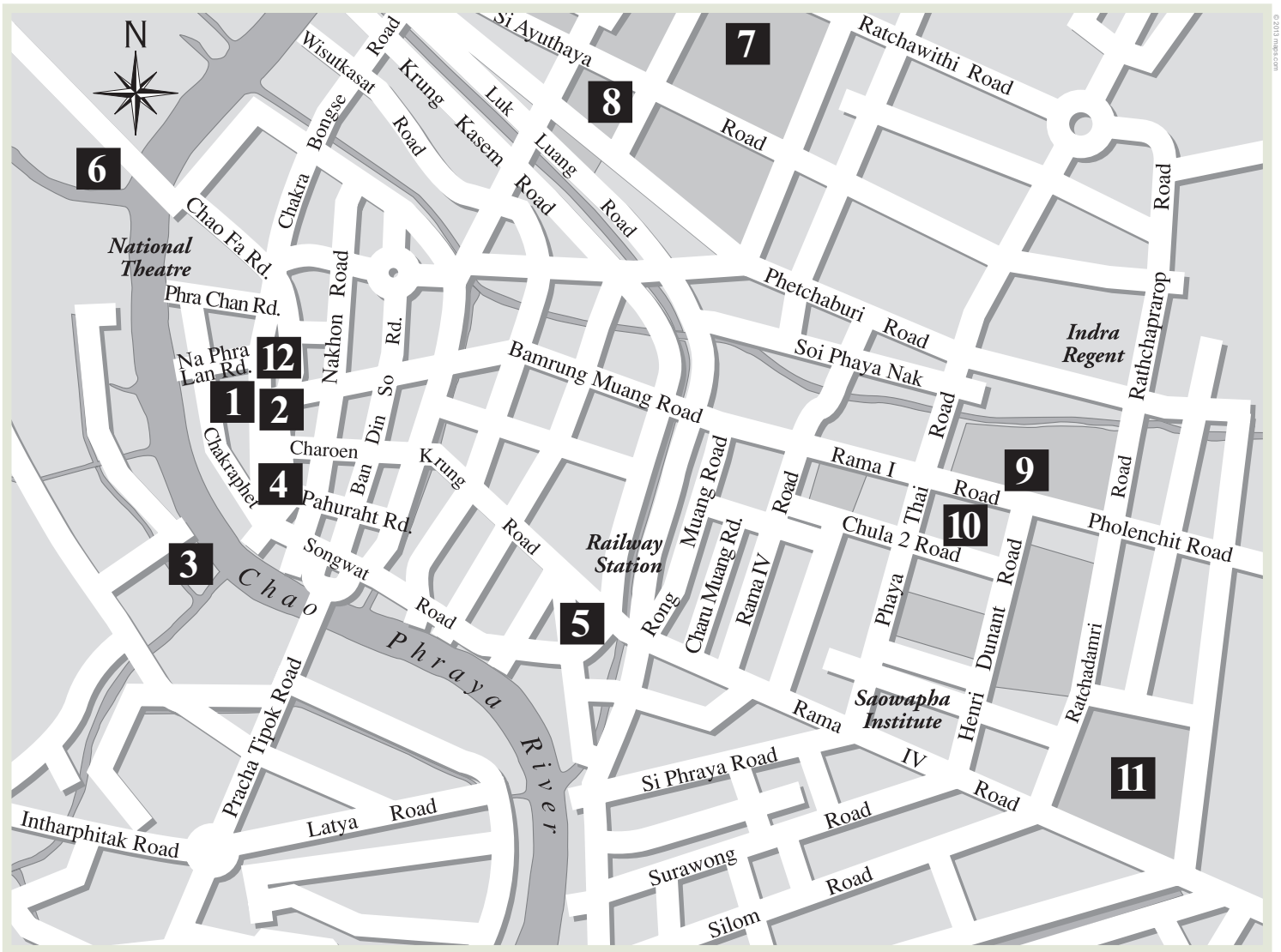
This fascinating city is filled with striking contrasts. To the casual observer, Bangkok resembles any other metropolis. Upon closer examination, you will find anything but that. Bangkok’s many facets characterize the many sides of Thailand and its people. Buddhism is an inseparable part of Thai society. It can be said that strong Buddhist influences shape how the Thai people think and act. This positive and gentle attitude is clearly reflected in the artistic creations found in Thailand. From graceful classical dances to intricate handicrafts, each reflects the beauty of this incredible country. Generally speaking, Thailand has three seasons; Hot (March - May), Rainy (June - October) and Cool (November - February).

HISTORY

Archaeologists believe that there has been continuous human occupation of Thailand for the last 20,000 years. In the 10th century AD the first recorded accounts show a migration of people to Thailand from southwest China. By 970 AD the two established Thai states unified to form the Kingdom of Ayuthaya. Their most powerful rivals were the Burmese who defeated the Ayuthaya Kingdom in 1569. The Burmese ruled for 15 years, only to be driven out in 1584. In 1767, the Burmese returned and again occupied the Thai capital, ending Ayuthaya’s rule. Within two years, the Burmese were expelled from Thailand and a new dynasty was founded by Chao Phraya Chakkri, known as Rama I. It was he who placed the capital at Krung Thep (Bangkok) in 1782. King Mongkut (Rama IV) ruled from 1851 to 1868 and began to modernize the country by introducing Western ideas. He is the King featured in the book and film, “The King and I.” Rama IV was also the King who officially used the word Siam for the first time. The popular name then, and sometimes used today, was Muan Thai, meaning “Land of the Free.” His son, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) implemented a policy of internal Western reform from 1886 to 1910 and in 1917 the Thai Kingdom joined the allies during World War I.

A coup d’etat in 1935 ended the absolute monarchy and a constitutional regime was established with the King’s support. In 1939 the country was officially renamed Thailand. From 1932 until 1980 there was considerable political unrest with a series of governments, mostly military. However, since 1768 Thailand has remained independent. It has good relations with neighboring countries and is the only Southeast Asia country never to have come under Western colonial rule.





BANGKOK POINTS OF INTEREST

1 The **Grand Palace** is Bangkok's major landmark. Bangkok's founder, King Rama I, built his palace and walled city at this location in 1782. Succeeding monarchs enlarged the compound with most buildings being used for state occasions. Today, the grounds encompass over 100 buildings which represents 200 years of Royal history. The current King of Thailand does not live here, but at Chitlada Palace a short distance away. A strict dress code is enforced, men should wear long pants and shirts with sleeves; women should be moderately dressed with shoulders covered. Bare feet are not allowed.



2 **Wat Phra Kaew** is also called the "Temple of the Emerald Buddha." This Wat (temple) is located within the Grand Palace complex and is the most sacred temple in the Kingdom. No other Wat in Thailand is so ornate and so embellished with statues, murals and gold. The 31 inch (79 centime-

ter) Buddha image is carved from a single piece of jade and is one of the most venerated images of the Buddha. History places the image in Chiang Rai (Northeast Thailand) in about 1464. Absolutely no photos or videos may be taken inside the main temple which houses the Emerald Buddha

3 **Wat Arun** is commonly referred to as the "Temple of Dawn" and is named after the Indian God of Dawn, Aruna. It is located on the Thonburi side of the Chao Phraya River and can be easily reached by cross-river ferries. Although the temple looks more impressive from a distance, it is nonetheless a fantastic construction. This was the last home of the Emerald Buddha before King Rama I brought it across the river to Bangkok. The 269 foot (82 meter) "prang" (Khmer-style tower) was constructed during the first half of the 19th century.

4 **Wat Po** or the "Temple of the Reclining Buddha" is the oldest and largest temple in Bangkok. The Reclining Buddha is the largest in the country measuring 151 feet (46 meters) in length. Another interesting feature are the 10 foot (3 meter) long feet, inlaid with mother of pearl designs depicting the 108 auspicious signs of the Lord Buddha. The temple grounds also houses four large Chedis commemorating the first three Chakri Kings, as well as 91 smaller Chedis, a library, sermon hall, school building and a Thai medicine/massage

training headquarters.

5 Wat Traimit also known as the “Temple of the Golden Buddha,” contains an impressive 10 foot (3 meter) tall, 5.5 ton (4,988.5 kilograms), solid gold Buddha image. It was sculpted in the Sukhothai style and was uncovered some 40 years ago. The gold image was hidden under layers of plaster to protect it from invading forces during the Sukhothai Period. Located near the intersection of Yaowarat and Charoen Krung Roads.

6 The Royal Barges are located along Khlong Bangkok Noi, near the Phra Pinklao Bridge. The Royal Barges are long, fantastically decorated boats used in ceremonial processions on the river. The largest is 164 feet (50 meters) long and requires a rowing crew of 50 men, seven umbrella bearers, two navigators, a flagman, two helmsmen, a chanter and rhythm keeper. The “Suphannahong Barge” is the most important as it is the King’s personal barge.



7 Chitlada Palace is off Rama V road and is one of the King’s official residences. It is surrounded by a moat and is guarded. Visitors are not allowed in the compound. Nearby though, you will find the Dusit Zoo or “Suan Sat Dusit”. This 47 acre (19 hectare) zoo comprises over 200 reptiles, 800 birds and 300 mammals. It was originally a private botanical garden for King Rama V, but was converted to a public zoo in 1938.

8 Wat Benchamabophit, the “Marble Temple,” was built in 1899. Statues of Buddha line the courtyard and the interior has cross-beams of gold and lacquer. The monastery contained within the compound is a seat of learning that appeals to Buddhist monks. Thailand’s present King spent his days as a monk here before his coronation.

9 Siam Paragon, an upscale shopping mall in Bangkok, was built on the former location of the Siam Intercontinental Hotel. It is one of the biggest shopping centers in Asia. It includes a wide range of stores and restaurants as well as a multiplex movie theatre. BTS Skytrain – Siam Station has a bridge linked to Siam Paragon’s M floor.

10 Siam Square on Rama I Road is a network of small streets (Soi) lined with shops. On the opposite side of Rama I stands Siam Center which was Thailand’s first shopping center and the Siam Discovery Center. You will find designer shops and a wide variety of coffee shops, banks and smaller vendors.

11 Lumpini Park is named after Buddha’s birthplace in Nepal and is the area’s largest and most popular park. A large artificial lake in the center is surrounded by wooded areas and walking paths. Rowboats and paddleboats can be rented at the lake. Early in the morning you can find local Chinese practicing T’ai Chi. Facilities include a snack bar, jogging track, picnic tables, restrooms and outdoor weight lifting area.

12 Lak Meuang or “City Pillar” is across the street from the eastern wall of Wat Phra Kaew. This shrine encloses a wooden pillar erected by Rama I in 1782 to represent the founding of the new capital. Five other idols were added by Rama V and the pillar is considered the city’s guardian deity.

SHORE EXCURSIONS

To make the most of your visit to Bangkok and surrounding areas, we suggest you take one of the organized Shore Excursions. For further information consult your Shore Excursion brochure or contact the Shore Excursion desk. When going ashore, guests are advised to take with them only the items they need and to secure any valuables.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Bargaining: Prices tend to be fixed in department stores, but smaller shops will negotiate. Bargaining, brought to Thailand many years ago by Arab and Indian traders, is essential in dealing in bazaars and with street vendors.

Tipping: Tipping is not a normal practice within Thailand, but has become standard in up-market hotels and restaurants. If no service charge is included, 10% would be acceptable.

Dress Code: The Thai people are very aware of neatness and style. Within Bangkok, T-Shirts, jeans and casual clothes will get you through most any occasion. Wear slip-on shoes (not open toe or open heel) to temples and ensure that socks do not have holes. Men should keep their shirts on at all times.

Avoiding Offence: Pointing the soles of the feet at a person or touching his head is considered rude in all Thailand. Never mutilate or step on a currency note as it contains a portrait of the revered King. Public affection between couples is frowned upon.

LOCAL CUISINE AND DRINK SPECIALTIES

Thai food is heavily influenced by the Chinese with elements from the Portuguese, Dutch and French. It is a blend of five distinct tastes: sweet, sour, salty, bitter and hot. Generally spicy, various dishes are in abundance as Thai’s love to eat. The National dish is Khao Phat, fried rice and egg, cucumber and chilies. A good introduction to Thai food is Tum Yum Goong, a soup with prawns, chilies and lemon grass, or Tum Yum Gai, with chicken substituted for the prawns. Dishes such as Phat Thai Kai, fried noodles, peanuts, beansprouts, eggs, chilies and chicken, are very popular. As for desserts, they tend to be very sweet and/or sticky. Mango with sticky (glutinous) rice blended with coconut milk is a favorite. The fruits of Mangosteen, Pomelos, Jackfruit, Rambutan and Durian are some of the best in the world.

Fresh fruit blends help to ease the heat of both the food and climate. Mekong Whiskey is about half the strength of scotch and quite popular, while Singha Beer is the best known local brew. Bottled water is recommended.

SHOPPING FACILITIES

Thailand can be a shopper's paradise, especially in the major tourist areas, but you never know when you will see something of interest. Bangkok has major shopping centers similar to those found at home, such as Emporium, Central Chidlom, The Siam Paragon – an upscale shopping mall in Bangkok. It is one of the biggest shopping centers in Asia. There are also centers mainly aimed at the local market, such as Mahboonkrong (MBK) which are a great place to find a bargain. Then there are areas such as Chinatown where there are many street stalls and shops to explore. Basically almost everything you have at home, is available here in Thailand and much less expensive.

Please be aware that many products made from animals or animal parts may be made from endangered species. Tiger, turtle, sea horse, some species of butterfly and other species, are protected by Thai Law. Ivory, Serow oil and elephant skin products are all on sale, however, no matter what you are told about the source of these products, be assured that the sale of these items is not legal. Thailand has an incredible range of handicraft and other products for sale, so your choice will not be limited.

LOCAL CURRENCY

The unit of currency in Thailand is called the Baht (B), pronounced "bot." There are 100 Stang to the Baht. Notes are available in the following denominations: 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 and 1,000.

POST OFFICE AND TELEPHONE FACILITIES

In Bangkok the General Post Office is on Charoen Krung Road and a CAT Telephone Office can be found around the corner from the Post Office building.

Dial the following access numbers to use a personal calling card:

AT&T: 1.800.0001.33 or 001.999.11111
MCI: 1.800.0001.20 or 1.800.0001.21

TRANSPORTATION

A limited number of taxis are available at the pier, but are not metered and prices must be negotiated. In Bangkok, buses and tuk-tuks (three-wheeled vehicles) are plentiful. Fares need to be negotiated and an itinerary set before getting into the vehicle.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The local Tourist Information Office (TAT) is located at 1600 New Petchaburi Road, Makkasan, Rajatevee, in Bangkok. For Emergencies, there is a Tourist Police - Dial 1155.

USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

Greetings/hello – Sawasdee (krab/kha)
No – Mai chai (krab/kha)
Thank you – Khob kun (krab/kha)
You're welcome – Yin dee (krab/kha)
Check (bill), please – Check bin (krab/kha)
Where is the toilet? – Hong num yoo nai (krab/kha)?

*Note: in the Thai language, "krab" denotes masculine gender (the speaker) and "kha" the feminine gender. English is widely spoken.
