

## Bangkok, Thailand



**Airport:** Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK)

**Served by:** British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Finnair, JAL Japan Airlines, Malév, Qantas, Royal Jordanian Airlines

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### City Statistics



**Location:** Central Plain, Thailand.

**Dialling code:** 66.

**Population:** 7 million (city); 10 million (metropolitan area).

**Time zone:** GMT + 7.

**Electricity:** 220 volts AC, 50Hz; two-pin plugs are standard.

**Average January temperatures:** 26°C (79°F).

**Average July temperatures:** 29°C (84°F).

**Annual rainfall:** 1,500mm (58.5 inches).

### Overview



Love it or hate it, buzzing, sweaty, exotic Bangkok is a city that really is larger than life. For some, the frenetic pace, heat, traffic and lack of personal space can be overpowering and are good reasons to pass through the city as quickly as possible but, for many others, the sheer dynamism is intoxicating.

A curious blend of the traditional East with the modern West, Bangkok's every street has a surprise in hold for the visitor. Ramshackle buildings crouch next to exotic temples surrounded by delightful gardens, which are in turn overlooked by modern hotels and offices.

The chaos on the roads is mirrored by the busy traffic on the Chao Phraya River, which dissects the city and is regularly crisscrossed by long-tailed boats, river taxis and small rowing boats, all miraculously missing each other.

But traditional Thai life is never very far away. Weaving among the nose-to-tail traffic in the morning rush hour, saffron-robed monks can still be seen collecting alms, while just moments from the city centre whole communities live in stilt houses by the river, eking out a living using skills that have not changed in centuries.

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Bangkok became the capital in 1782, but the absolute rule of the monarchy ended in 1932 when it was replaced by a system of constitutional monarchy. To this day, the monarchy is regarded with almost religious reverence and it is an offence, punishable by imprisonment, to insult the royal family. His Majesty King Bhumibol is the longest-reigning monarch in the world, having come to power in 1946.

Following the end of absolute monarchy, Thailand moved towards democracy, but this has been thwarted by the military, which has often staged coups in protest at government policies. The most recent was in September 2006 when a bloodless coup overthrew the Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Anti-government demonstrations took place in August 2008 and the Prime Minister, only elected in December 2007, was removed from office and replaced by Prime Minister Somchai in September.

Thailand is a tropical country so it is hot throughout the year, but the best time to visit is between November and March, during the dry season. During the rainy season, humidity is very high and the downpours are short but violent and the streets of Bangkok often flood.

## Getting There By Air



### Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK)

Tel: (02) 132 1888/3888.

Website: [www2.airportthai.co.th](http://www2.airportthai.co.th)

Bangkok International Airport, located 30km (19 miles) east of the city centre, is operated by the *Airports Authority of Thailand*. Opened in September 2006, to replace cramped Don Muang Airport, it is a major gateway to South-East Asia.

**Approximate flight times to Bangkok:** From London is 11 hours 20 minutes; from New York is 19 hours 25 minutes; from Los Angeles is 9 hours 5 minutes; from Toronto is 19 hours 40 minutes and from Sydney is 9 hours 20 minutes.

**Airport facilities:** These include 24-hour shopping, duty-free, restaurants, snack bars, postal services, bureaux de change, tourist information, hotel reservations, left luggage and medical service. Car hire companies include *Avis* and *Budget*.

**Business facilities:** There is a business centre and Internet facilities. There are several executive lounges and services including limousine hire.

**Transport to the city:** Taxis can be pre-paid for at the Arrivals Hall in the airport; visitors should expect to pay up to B1,200 to the city centre (journey time - 40-90 minutes) including road tolls. Airport Express buses operate four different routes into the city. Route AE1 goes to the Silom Road business district, AE2 goes to Banglamphu, AE3 goes to Sukhumvit and AE4 goes to Hualampong Railway Station (journey times - about 1 hour). An overhead city rail link is currently under construction and is expected to open in mid 2009.

## Getting Around



**Public Transport:** The public transport system within Bangkok is plentiful and cheap, although most visitors use the taxis or the three-wheeled *tuk tuks* (see below). An **elevated monorail**, called the Bangkok Transit System (tel: (02) 617 6000; website: [www.bts.co.th](http://www.bts.co.th)) but known as the *Skytrain*, operates on two lines across the city. The Sukhumvit Line runs from On Nut along Sukhumvit Road to Siam Square, Phaya Thai Road, Victory Monument and Mo Chit. The Silom Line starts at Saphan Taksin and runs through Silom's business area, Siam Square, ending at the National Stadium. Since opening, the efficient Skytrain has vastly improved the time it takes to move around the city. The government has approved extension of the lines across the river

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and to the south, but there is no news on an opening date yet. Trains operate frequently 0600-0000. Tickets should be purchased from automatic ticket machines. **Passes** can be bought for 20, 30 and 40 journeys, to be used within 30 days. A one-day pass is available for unlimited trips.

The Bangkok **Metro** (tel: (02) 354 2000 or 624 5200; website: [www.bangkokmetro.co.th](http://www.bangkokmetro.co.th)), opened in 2004, covers parts of the city not served by the Skytrain. Its one route starts at Hualampong station and finishes at Bang Sue in the north of the city. There are 18 stations in total with three intersecting with the Skytrain. The service operates 0600-0000. Tokens should be purchased from automatic ticket machines; fares depend on the distance travelled. **Passes** can be bought for one day and three days.

The *Bangkok Mass Transit Authority* (tel: (02) 246 0973; website: [www.bmta.co.th](http://www.bmta.co.th)) runs a comprehensive and highly complex **bus** system, which operates across the city 0500-2300. Fares depend on the distance travelled and the type of bus. The yellow and orange Euro II air-conditioned buses use fuel-efficient engines to attempt to reduce air pollution in the city. Microbuses have guaranteed seats. There is also a limited night service (cream and red buses). Bus route maps are widely available in hotels and bookshops.

**Taxis:** Taxis can be hailed on the streets. If they are metered taxis, they will have a taxi meter sign on the roof. Visitors should check that the meter is turned on. If stuck in heavy traffic, the meter will start increasing by the minute. There is a minimum charge for the first couple of kilometres. There are also unmetered taxis where the fare must be agreed upon in advance. Passengers always have to pay for any road tolls incurred and should ensure they have plenty of small change to pay the taxi fare. Many people arrange a taxi through the concierge at their hotel where the rate is fixed and paid to the hotel before departure. It is also possible to hire a taxi for longer trips. In these cases, a fare should always be agreed in advance, even with metered taxis. Tipping is not expected but much appreciated.

### Tuk tuk

These three-wheeled taxis ply the streets and are ideal for short journeys. Fares must be negotiated before getting in and depend on the distance travelled. The number of tuk tuks in the city is decreasing but they can still be found around hotels and visitor attractions.

### River taxis

Numerous river taxis, operated by *Chao Phraya Express Boat* (tel: (02) 623 6143; website: [www.chaophrayaboat.co.th](http://www.chaophrayaboat.co.th)), travel upstream and downstream on the Chao Phraya River, acting more like buses than taxis. Some special express boats operate only during the morning and evening rush hours with limited stops. The destinations/stops are indicated by different coloured flags. Other smaller boats shuttle from one side of the river to the other. A service operates from Sathorn Pier near the Saphan Taksin Skytrain station to 10 piers near major attractions and ends at Phra Arthit Pier. The service operates daily 0930-1600, with departures every 30 minutes, and a one-day unlimited pass costs B120.

### Motorcycle taxis

As a result of the gridlock experienced during the rush hour, motorcycle taxis are now popular as they can manoeuvre between the cars to reach their destination more quickly. It is compulsory for passengers to wear helmets, which are supplied by the driver. Drivers wear coloured tabards for identification and wait at road intersections.

**Driving in the City:** Driving in Bangkok requires a great deal of patience and a certain stubbornness. Few visitors attempt to hire a car, as good knowledge of the city is required to be able to drive around. The density of the traffic and the number of lanes mean that drivers always need to know which lane to be in. There are a number of expressways crossing the city with clearly signposted exits but traffic is often gridlocked during rush hour (0700-0900 and 1600-1800). Traffic direction and entry/exit locations change during the day without warning. Bangkok drivers, in particular taxis, buses and motorbikes, are very aggressive and unlikely to give way.

For those who do risk driving, many of the large shopping complexes and hotels have a car park attached and a convenient location is the Siam Centre on Rama I Road, which is open 24 hours.

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**Car Hire:** Many visitors to Thailand now choose to hire a car, although few hire one within Bangkok because of the difficulties of moving through the constantly heavy traffic. Car hire companies vary but drivers must be at least 21 or 23 years old and have held a driving licence for one to two years. A national licence is required. It is compulsory to purchase Collision Damage Waiver and Theft Protection and these are generally included in the hire price. Payment must be made by credit card. *Avis* have an office at 2/12-13 Wireless Road (tel: (02) 255 5300; website: [www.avisthailand.com](http://www.avisthailand.com)), and *Budget* at 19-23 Building A, Royal City Avenue, New Petchburi Road (tel: (02) 203 9294; website: [www.budget.co.th](http://www.budget.co.th)).

**Bicycle Hire:** On Rattanakosin Island, footpaths have been converted into cycle paths, which pass places such as the Royal Grand Palace and Sanam Luang. Bicycles can be hired from *Spice Roads* (tel: (02) 712 5305; website: [www.spiceroads.com](http://www.spiceroads.com)). Cash or credit card deposit of THB20,000 is required.

## Hotels



### Hotels

Many of the more upmarket hotels quote their prices in US dollars. Payment can usually be made in either Thai baht or US dollars. Hotels will usually add a service charge of 10% service charge and VAT at 7% to the hotel bill at the end. This tax could change as it is a government levy.

The hotels below have been grouped alphabetically into four different pricing categories:

\$\$\$\$ (over US\$220)

\$\$\$ (US\$160 to US\$220)

\$\$ (US\$100 to US\$160)

\$ (under US\$100)

The prices quoted above are the lowest standard rates for a double room, excluding VAT and excluding breakfast, unless otherwise specified.

### Luxury

#### Shangri-La

The Shangri-La is set in tropical gardens on the banks of the river, close to the business district, and has an enviable reputation. The rooms are decorated in relaxing colours and all have a big executive desk, voice-mail and modem point and broadband Internet connection. There are 26 function rooms, all equipped with the most advanced conference equipment, while the Grand Ballroom can accommodate up to 1,000 seated guests. Additional facilities include a shopping arcade, two pools, spa, fully equipped gym, tennis and squash courts, sauna and Jacuzzi. There is a good choice of restaurants, including the **Next2** terrace for evening barbecues and Sunday brunch.

90 Soi Wat Suan Plu, New Road

Tel: (02) 236 7777.

Website: [www.shangri-la.com](http://www.shangri-la.com)

Price: \$\$\$\$

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### The Oriental

One of the most famous hotels in the world, The Oriental is located by the Chao Phraya River and is the hotel of choice for royalty and celebrities past and present, such as Somerset Maugham, the Prince of Wales and Elizabeth Taylor. Although the original Author's Wing was built in 1887 and is very much colonial in style, two more modern wings tend to dominate the appearance of the hotel. However, the 393 rooms (including 35 suites) are all sumptuously decorated and have satellite TV, CD player, fridge, mini-bar and telephone lines with Internet access, while some have a split-level layout. The business centre has four meeting rooms and two boardrooms capable of holding up to 14 people and eight other function rooms catering for up to 1,000 guests. In addition, there are several exquisite restaurants, including **Le Normandie** (see *Restaurants*), various bars, two swimming pools, a spa, Thai cooking school, fitness centre and shopping arcade.

48 Oriental Avenue

Tel: (02) 659 9000.

Website: [www.mandarinoriental.com/bangkok](http://www.mandarinoriental.com/bangkok)

Price: \$\$\$\$

### Moderate

#### Bel Aire Princess

This friendly first class hotel is conveniently located off the Sukhumvit Road, close to Nana Skytrain station and the expressway for the airport. It is decked out with a stylish minimalism. The 160 comfortable rooms are all good-sized with private bathrooms, satellite TV, mini-bar and tea and coffee making facilities. There is one restaurant serving Thai, Continental and Indian food, a bar plus an outdoor swimming pool and well-equipped fitness centre. In addition there is a business centre plus a meeting room which can hold up to 100 people.

16 Sukhumvit Soi 5

Tel: (02) 253 4300.

Website: [www.bel-aireprincess.com](http://www.bel-aireprincess.com)

Price: \$\$

#### Dream Hotel

This trendy boutique hotel, where the style is a fusion of East meets West, is now well-established on the Bangkok scene. The 200 rooms have plasma TVs, ipods, Wi-Fi and under-bed lighting. There are even pet-friendly rooms. There is one restaurant, **Flava**, and a cocktail lounge, spa, health club, swimming pool and business centre.

10 Sukhumvit Soi 15

Tel: (02) 254 8500.

Website: [www.dreambkk.com](http://www.dreambkk.com)

Price: \$\$

### Other Recommendations

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## The Eugenia

A fine boutique hotel, with just 12 suites, in an elegant colonial house. The suites all have antique furniture, part of a collection belonging to the owner. There is a lounge bar and a restaurant, the **D B Bradley**, which serves a fusion of east and west. Facilities include an open-air swimming pool and high-speed Internet access. Airport transfers can be arranged in one of their fleet of vintage cars.

267 Soi Sukhumvit 31, North Klongtan, Wattana

Tel: (02) 259 9017.

Website: [www.theeugenia.com](http://www.theeugenia.com)

Price: \$\$\$

## Business Etiquette



Most senior businesspeople in large or international companies will speak English, but it is not common in smaller companies. It is essential to make appointments for business meetings and to exchange business cards. Punctuality is also very important (although the visitor is quite often likely to be kept waiting after arrival), so the Bangkok traffic must be taken into consideration when going to appointments. Thai hosts are quite likely to give small gifts to visitors, so it is a good idea to reciprocate with a typical national gift of one's own. Visitors should never get angry or raise their voice if things are not going according to plan, as this will mean a loss of face on both sides. Much more progress will be made by remaining calm.

Meetings often take place over lunch and these are generally held in a Thai restaurant. Thai businesspeople are quite formal in their dress but, because of the extreme heat, it is quite acceptable and practical to dispense with the wearing of a suit jacket. Office hours are usually Monday to Friday 0800-1700. There is a large expat community in Bangkok, as well as a big after-work drinking scene.

## Sightseeing



**Sightseeing Overview:** The sprawling city of Bangkok is full of interesting attractions for tourists, but the heavily congested traffic means it is difficult to cover a lot of ground in a single day. Sightseeing should be selective if time is short or restricted to one area per day, although the Skytrain and Metro do help visitors travel across town more quickly.

An excellent way to appreciate the city's layout is to go to the **observation deck** on the 77th floor of the **Baiyoke Sky Hotel**, one of the tallest hotels in the world.

Many of the main places of interest, such as the **Royal Grand Palace**, **Wat Pho** and the **National Museum**, are to the east of the Chao Phraya River (west of the north-south railway line) in an area called **Rattanakosin Island**, which is also home to many hotels. However, some visitors may stay to the east of the railway line in the **Sukhumvit Road** area, where there is excellent shopping, nightlife and tourist sights, such as **Suan Pakkard Palace Museum** and **Jim Thompson Thai House**.

Apart from the major sights (see *Key Attractions*), which are all 'must-see', there are numerous other attractions, including over 400 temples. To the north of the Royal Grand Palace is **Sanam Luang**, which is a huge public area surrounded by old tamarind trees. This area is used for many ceremonies throughout the year, such as the Ploughing Ceremony, as well as being a popular place for kite-flying and just passing the time.

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The revamped **Museum of Siam**, on Sanam Chai Road, traces the history of Thailand up to the modern day using interactive exhibits. **Siam Ocean World** is an aquarium attraction with a variety of deep ocean habitats and the opportunity to dive with sharks.

**Chinatown** is a lively area located between the river and Hualampong railway station. The area is fascinating for its maze of narrow lanes and open-fronted shops selling a cornucopia of items. On Yaowarat Road, **Wat Trai Mit** houses a gleaming solid gold Buddha, 3m (10ft) high and weighing over five tons. Close to Chinatown is **Phahurat**, the main Indian area, crammed with colourful fabric shops and excellent restaurants.

On Si Ayutthaya Road, in an elegant area full of government buildings and the current royal residence, is **Wat Benjamabopit**, mainly built with Italian marble and a mix of European and Thai architecture. **Lumphini Park** is a haven of tranquillity in the heart of the city, dotted with pavilions and two small lakes.

For visitors who do not have time to travel in the rest of Thailand, the **Ancient City** is an open-air museum with full-size and scaled-down replicas of famous buildings, monuments and temples from all over the country. It covers an area of 112 hectares (280 acres) and is 33km (20 miles) southeast of the city centre.

Well worth a visit is **Bang Pa In**, 60km (37 miles) north of Bangkok, the former summer residence of the royal family in the 17th century, which is a collection of buildings reflecting Oriental and European influences.

Whether visiting palaces or temples, it is important to dress respectfully. Entry can and will be refused if this rule is not followed.

**Tourist Information: Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)**

First Floor, 1600 New Phetburi Road

Makkasan, Rajatevee

Tel: (02) 250 5500.

Website: [www.tourismthailand.org](http://www.tourismthailand.org)

Opening hours: Mon-Fri 0830-1630.

The TAT Call Centre (tel: 1672) is open daily 0800-2000. The tourist police provide 24-hour assistance for complaints and emergencies through the toll-free hotline (tel: 1155).

## Key Attractions



### Royal Grand Palace

The Royal Grand Palace is a glittering walled complex that houses several palaces, all highly decorated with tiles and ceramics. Building began in 1782 when Bangkok was founded as the capital of Thailand. The complex houses Wat Phra Kaeo, the holiest of all Thai temples, where the sacred Emerald Buddha rests, not covered in emeralds but jade. There is a strict dress code and visitors wearing shorts, mini-skirts, sleeveless shirts or flip-flops will be refused entry, although it is possible to hire trousers and plastic shoes.

Na Phra Lan Road

Tel: (02) 623 5500.

Website: [www.palaces.thai.net](http://www.palaces.thai.net)

Opening hours: Daily 0830-1530.

Admission charge.

### Vimanmek Palace

Vimanmek Palace is the world's largest building made entirely of golden teak. It used to be a royal summer retreat and was dismantled and rebuilt in Bangkok in 1900. The 81-room mansion stands in carefully manicured lawns, located close to the current royal residence, and contains 31 exhibition rooms. Visitors



are not free to wander but must take a guided tour, which take place every 30 minutes. Highlights include Thailand's first indoor bathroom and the oldest typewriter with Thai characters. The dress code is the same as for the Royal Grand Palace.

Ratchawithi Road

Tel: (02) 628 6300.

Website: [www.palaces.thai.net](http://www.palaces.thai.net)

Opening hours: Daily 0930-1515.

Admission charge (included with ticket to the Royal Grand Palace).

### **Wat Pho (Temple of the Reclining Buddha)**

Wat Pho is the oldest and largest temple in Bangkok and houses an enormous gold-plated Reclining Buddha, which is 46m (150ft) long and 15m (49ft) high. Today, the temple is also renowned for its teaching of herbal medicine and traditional massage. There is a strict dress code.

Thai Wang Road

Tel: (02) 225 9595.

Website: [www.watpho.com](http://www.watpho.com)

Opening hours: Daily 0830-1700.

Admission charge.

### **National Museum**

One of the largest and most comprehensive museums in the region, the National Museum houses a vast collection of artefacts from the Neolithic period through to more recent periods. The building, begun in 1782, is fascinating in its own right, having been built in traditional Thai style. The museum is so large that it needs more than one visit, however if time is short, it must be spent in the lovely teak pavilion, which houses personal royal belongings. Free guided tours in English are given by volunteers at 0930 on Wednesdays and Thursdays and are highly recommended.

Na Phrathat Road

Tel: (02) 224 1333/1370.

Website: [www.thailandmuseum.com](http://www.thailandmuseum.com)

Opening hours: Wed-Sun 0900-1600.

Admission charge.

### **Wat Arun (Temple of Dawn)**

Located on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River, the 17th-century Wat Arun has a 79m- (259ft-) high tower decorated with multicoloured ceramic tiles, which makes it a landmark along the river. The effect of the tiles is best observed at a distance. The temple was the first home of the Emerald Buddha before it was transferred to Wat Phra Kaeo in 1785. There is a nightly light and sound show between October and May.

Arun Amarin Road

Tel: (02) 465 5640.

Website: [www.watarun.org](http://www.watarun.org)

Opening hours: Daily 0730-1730.

Admission charge.

### **Jim Thompson Thai House**

Jim Thompson was an American who came to Bangkok after WWII and the Jim Thompson Thai House was his home until he mysteriously disappeared in Malaysia in 1967. He completely revived the Thai silk industry



and his house, traditionally Thai in style, is now a museum showing his collection of Asian artefacts. The house is a complex of six traditional Thai teak structures brought to Bangkok from various parts of Thailand and its construction was completed in 1955. The house can only be visited on a guided tour.

6 Soi Kasemsan 2 Song, Rama I Road

Tel: (02) 216 7368.

Website: [www.jimthompsonhouse.com](http://www.jimthompsonhouse.com)

Opening hours: Daily 0900-1700 (last tour at 1630).

Admission charge.

### Royal Barge National Museum

The royal barges are rarely used by the royal family these days because of their age. A few of them are now preserved in the Royal Barge National Museum on the Thonburi side of the Chao Phraya River. The eight long, narrow boats on display are intricately gilded and each need between 50 and 60 rowers to take their oars. The figure on the bow of each boat signifies whether it carries the King and Queen or other members of the royal family. The most important barge is the Suphannahong, exclusively used by the King.

Khlong Bangkok Noi

Tel: (02) 424 0004.

Website: [www.thailandmuseum.com](http://www.thailandmuseum.com)

Opening hours: Daily 0900-1700.

Admission charge.

## Culture



Bangkok has many traditional dance and theatre groups, which perform around the city, although nowadays they are more popular with tourists than locals, who have generally embraced Western imports. The city does have its own orchestra, the Bangkok Symphony Orchestra. Western plays, with famous actors from Britain and America, are often put on for short seasons at some of the international hotels.

Both Thai and international cultural performances, including classical music, dance, ballet and pop concerts, are frequently held in the **Thailand Cultural Centre**, Ratchadaphisek Road (tel: (02) 247 0028; website: [www.culture.go.th](http://www.culture.go.th)), the **National Theatre**, Rachini Road (tel: (02) 224 1342), and **Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre**, New Ratchadaphisek Road (tel: (02) 229 3000; website: [www.qsncc.co.th](http://www.qsncc.co.th)). Tickets can be obtained in advance from the venues or from *Thai Ticketmajor* (tel: (02) 262 3456; website: [www.thaiticketmajor.com](http://www.thaiticketmajor.com)). A good what's on website is [www.bangkokconcerts.org](http://www.bangkokconcerts.org).

**Music and Dance: Sala Rim Naam** (tel: (02) 437 6211) is owned by The Oriental Hotel and is located on the opposite bank of the Chao Phraya River, next to the Peninsula Hotel. The nightly traditional music and dance show starts at 2030, preceded by dinner at 1900. Although there are numerous traditional shows daily throughout the city, this one, reputed to be the best in Thailand and beautifully located in a traditional teak pavilion-style restaurant, is unmissable. Thai classical performing arts take place at the **Patravadi Theatre** (tel: (02) 412 7287; website: [www.patravadi theatre.com](http://www.patravadi theatre.com)) on Soi Wat Rakhang. **Siam Niramit**, on Tiamruammit Road, is a lavish music and dance spectacular which is often sold out (tel: (02) 649 9222; website: [www.siamniramit.com](http://www.siamniramit.com)).

The Bangkok Symphony Orchestra (tel: (02) 255 6617; website: [www.bangkoksymphony.net](http://www.bangkoksymphony.net)) performs in the **Thailand Cultural Centre** (see above) and other venues around Bangkok. Bangkok Opera (tel: (02) 663 3236 or 661 4688 for tickets; website: [www.bangkokopera.org](http://www.bangkokopera.org)) also performs at the centre.

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**Theatre:** Classical dramas are very colourful and expressive and these are held on the last Friday and Saturday of each month at the **National Theatre** (see above). The **Joe Louis Puppet Theatre**, by the Suan Lum Night Bazaar (tel: (02) 252 9683; website: [www.thaipuppet.com/core](http://www.thaipuppet.com/core)) depicts the story of the Ramakien in a fun and colourful way with large puppets which need three people to work them. The **Chalerm Krung Royal Theatre**, on Charoen Krung (New Road) (tel: (02) 222 0434; website: [www.salachalermkrung.com](http://www.salachalermkrung.com)), has regular performances of plays and musical dance dramas. For those fascinated by the infamous 'ladyboys' or *katoeys* of Bangkok, there are two performances each night at the Calypso Cabaret in the **Asia Hotel** on Phayathai Road (tel: (02) 653 3960; website: [www.calypsocabaret.com](http://www.calypsocabaret.com)), which are always packed out.

**Film:** Bangkok has a large number of cinemas but not all show English-language films. Some show movies with English soundtracks but many will have been dubbed into Thai. Cinemas that show films in English or with English subtitles include: **EGV Multiplexes** and **Major Cineplexes** (both Movie Line tel: (02) 515 5555; website: [www.majorcineplex.com](http://www.majorcineplex.com)), both with various venues throughout the city; **Lido Multiplex**, Rama I Road (tel: (02) 252 6498), and **Krungsri Imax** (Movie Line tel: (02) 515 5555; website: [www.imaxthai.com](http://www.imaxthai.com)) located in the Siam Paragon Mall.

Nineteenth-century Bangkok features in the spectacular film *Anna and the King* (1999). The filming did not take place in the city as the Thais banned the book on which it was based (see *Literary Notes* below), as well as the earlier film, starring Yul Brynner, claiming that they were historically inaccurate. The James Bond movie, *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974) uses Bangkok, as well as the stunning Phang Nha Bay, as a backdrop.

A 2001 epic *Suriyothai* (directed by Prince Chatrichalerm Yukol) depicts life in the Ayutthaya period of Thai history and the story of the heroic Queen Suriyothai, with some incredible battle scenes. Thai director Pen-Ek Ratanaruang is one of Asia's bright new hopes. His film *Last Life in the Universe* (2003) about a romance between a suicidal Japanese man and a Thai prostitute in Bangkok has gained critical acclaim. In 2006 he directed *Digital Sam in Sam Saek 2006: Talk to Her* and *Invisible Waves*.

Some of the scenes from the very successful *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004), directed by Beeban Kidron, were filmed around Soi Cowboy in Bangkok as well as the 2008 remake of *Bangkok Dangerous* directed by the Pang brothers.

**Literary Notes:** A prolific writer of the darker side of expat life is Christopher G Moore who often uses Bangkok as a backdrop. Particularly well known are *Spirit House* (1992) and *Asia Hand* (1993), the first two books in a series of seven titles featuring the private eye Vincent Calvino. The latest one, *Minor Wife*, was published in 2002. Jake Needham's novel, *The Big Mango* (1999), depicts the story of an ex-GI returning to Bangkok in search of money stolen from a Vietnamese bank. *The Beach*, by Alex Garland (1997) is also a good read for anyone heading to Thailand, and his depiction of the backpacker scene in Bangkok is particularly accurate. Dean Barrett's 2003 *Skytrain to Murder* is a murder mystery set in Bangkok.

*The King and I* (1956) is probably the most famous film about Bangkok and the royal court. The film is based on the book *Anna and the King of Siam* (1944) by Margaret Landon, which itself is a novel adapted from *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, the memoirs of Anna Leonowens, recounting her period as a governess in the court of King Mongkut. A more historically accurate account of the time can be found in *The Kingdom and the People of Siam* (1857) by Sir John Bowring, who was responsible for negotiating the treaty with King Mongkut.

Still based around the royal family, *The Bangkok Secret* (1990) by Anthony Grey investigates the mystery surrounding the murder of King Ananda in Bangkok in 1946 - an event that is often glossed over and the identity of the assailant is still unknown. One of the best-known residents of Bangkok was Jim Thompson, who was responsible for building a major industry (silk) and whose home is a Bangkok landmark (see *Key Attractions*). He mysteriously vanished in Malaysia in 1967 and William Warren wrote a book about his life and disappearance called *Jim Thompson: The Legendary American of Thailand* (1976).

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