

15 REASONS TO GO TO

BANGKOK

Whether you're eating at street level, exploring markets, malls and galleries or putting on the ritz at a rooftop bar, the Thai capital will leave you wanting more

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1 MAMBO ITALIANO ◀

The revamped InterContinental Bangkok has had a serious facelift, and part of its stylish, two-year makeover includes a new Italian eatery from Melbourne *cucina Italiana* maestro Guy Grossi. Expect Grossi signatures such as suckling lamb alla Romana, as well as authentic pizzas and delicate homemade pastas. Emphasis is on top-notch produce, some Victorian, but the hunks of Italian salumi come straight from the motherland. Make sure you pop into InterCon's new chocolate shop, Choc!, for handpainted truffles that look too good to eat (well, almost). **973 Ploenchit Rd, Pathumwan, +66 2656 0444, intercontinental.com.**

2 MATERIAL GAIN ▶

Bangkok designers have been heating up US and European catwalks since the 1990s. Visit Gaysorn Plaza for local talent such as Sretsis for pretty frocks and Chanel-inspired jackets, or Fly Now, for billowing blouses, sequined shifts and couture stored in museum-like glass domes. Then step into playful Ggub, with its wall illustrations and kooky 'fruit' chandeliers, for one-off jewelled fabric bags and cuff bracelets (pictured). **999 Ploenchit Rd, Pathumwan, gaysorn.com.**



3 POINTS OF VIEW ▶

There's plenty to see on the contemporary Thai art scene, but you need to scour the small, often privately owned, galleries. Pick up a free copy of *BAM!* (Bangkok Art Map) to see what's on and create your own tour. Pictured right is H Gallery (**201 Sathorn Soi 12, +66 2234 7556, hgallerybkk.com**), a converted schoolhouse run by American expat, Ernest H Lee, better known as 'H'. For contrast, head to 100 Tonson Gallery (**100 Soi Tonson, Ploenchit Rd, Lumpini, +66 2684 1527, 100tonsongallery.com**) for multimedia art in a large, concrete space.



4 COOK WITH CLASS ▼

Along the banks of the Yai Canal, off the Chao Phraya river, is Amita Thai Cooking Class. Blue Elephant this ain't, but instead, a creative, family-run operation that's a labour of love. The owner, Tam (pictured), who traded a legal career for cooking, is an extraordinary source of Thai culinary knowledge. Instead of a lesson on ingredients in the market, she'll walk you through her garden, blooming with fragrant basil and limes. Master favourites such as pad Thai and green chicken curry in the open kitchen, before feasting on the results, followed by a huge tropical fruit platter. **162/17 Soi Wutthakat 14, Wutthakat Rd, Talad Plu, Thonburi, +66 2466 8966, amitathaicooking.com.**



HEIRS APPARENT ▶

After working in London under Thai culinary maestro David Thompson at Michelin-starred Nahm, chefs Bo Songvisava, a Bangkok native, and Australian Dylan Jones have joined forces (and names - Bo.Lan means 'antique'). In a wooden bungalow surrounded by lotus-studded pools and gardens, they turn out sophisticated, traditional Thai dishes, including more unusual, home-style fare. Flavours and textures magically come to play in a salad of prawn, eggplant and soft-boiled egg, and a sour orange mackerel curry. At weekends, Bo.Lan does Thai tapas-style, so you can sample a bit of everything. **42 Soi Sukhumvit 26, Klongtan Khlong Toey, +66 2260 2962, bolan.co.th.**

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Bo.Lan restaurant

Bangkok Art and Culture Centre



6 TALKING POINT ◀

Bangkok's not all about shopping, as the artists who campaigned for the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (939 Rama 1 Rd, Wongmai, +66 2214 6630, bacc.or.th) have proved. This striking, 11-storey atrium, which opened last July, echoes New York's Guggenheim. Though four floors (ironically intended for retail and restaurants) aren't, as yet, occupied, the exhibitions on the top levels illustrate the city's creative spirit. Nearby is the Thailand Creative and Design Centre at Emporium, with its quirky little design shop. 622 Sukhumvit 24, +66 2664 8448, tcdc.or.th.



7 MARKET FORCES ◀

Allow at least half a day to meander among Chatuchak Market's 10,000 stalls. Go at the weekend and you'll be able to haggle over anything from a hill-tribe basket to a Siamese fighting fish. Section 26 has interesting antiques, silver and leather, and a cafe serving Illy coffee. There's even a DHL to freight goods home. On the other side of Kamphaeng Phet station, Or Tor Kor has a dizzying array of produce and local fare.



8 STYLE ON THE RUN ▲

Boutique and bespoke tailor Enlever ses Vêtements is a far cry from the loud logos and Bangkok bling. In this stark shop, with its Calvin Klein hues, 32-year-old, New York-trained designer Suparerk Bhasaputra (aka Louie, pictured), creates Savile Row-quality men's suits. His business has paved the way for Louie's Mobile Store, for which he travels from Paris to Taipei, running a by-appointment-only service from a hotel room. Allow five days for a suit and be sure to check out Rerk Gallery upstairs, which houses modern, multimedia art. 59/3 Sukhumvit 31, +66 86 977 9202, enleversesvetements.com.

9 HEAVEN ON A SWIZZLE STICK ◀

Escape the crowds, humidity and traffic at a rooftop bar. The air is cleaner and, with a martini in hand, all tuk tuk trauma evaporates. Moon Bar (21/100 South Sathon Rd, Sathon, +66 2679 1200) shares the same altitude as Vertigo restaurant in the Banyan Tree hotel and is an institution if you're fit enough to scale the extra three flights after the lift reaches the top floor. At Centara Grand, Red Sky (999/99 Rama 1 Road, Pathumwan, +66 2769 1234) lights up Bangkok with its giant, illuminated, lotus-inspired arch. Inside, there's a 'wine angel' on a wire who retrieves the 200-plus drops from the two-storey glass cellar.



BACK TO BASICS ►

Bangkok's cultural melting pot of Chinese, Indians and Muslims produces great home-style food. Polo Fried Chicken (pictured) (137/1-2 Soi Polo, off Wireless Rd, Lumpini, +66 2251 2772) is famous for its tender chook with crisp garlic. David Thompson loves Krua Apsorn (503 Samsen Rd, +66 2241 8528), especially its yellow curry with prawns and lotus shoots. The menu at this noisy diner is in Thai, but pictures illustrate its other specials of crab omelette or mussels with basil.

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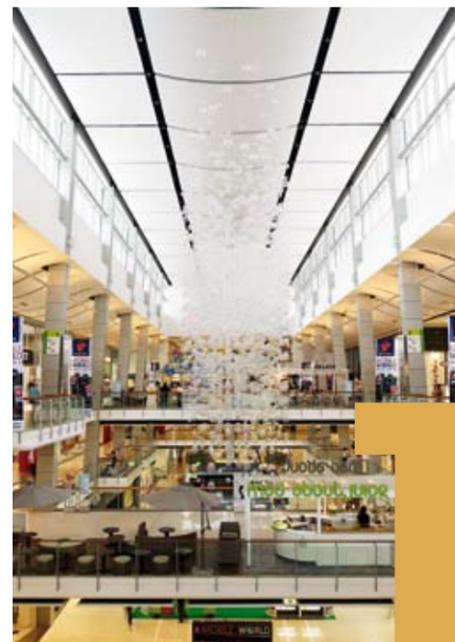


11 FIT FOR A KING ▶
 Bangkok locals are passionate about two things: their royal family and food. ML Kwantip Devakula, a blue-blood descendant, is also a celebrity chef with an impressive CV of food writing and cooking classes. At her restaurant, Deva, her repertoire is an extensive (sometimes baffling) fusion of Thai palace cuisine and international fare (think fettuccine with beef masaman). Graze on miang (moreish savoury kale bundles), then move on to Siamese Senna curry, a remnant of a bygone era when housewives boiled wild, bitter creepers for hours to create a delicious dish. **32/1 Sukhumvit 39, Wattana, +66 2662 5427.**

12 PEACE CORPS ◀
 In a country with its own brand of massage, you're not going to run short of a good spa in its capital. Spa Cenvarree (Centara Grand at CentralWorld, 999/99 Rama 1 Rd, Pathumwan, +66 2100 1234) took the gong for best new spa in the 2009 Asia Spa & Wellness Festival Gold Awards. It offers all the bells and whistles, plus a juice bar and private outdoor decks for contemplation after a four-hand 'Thai Harmony' massage. RarinJinda Wellness Spa Resort (pictured) won best day spa at the same awards. Silence your demons here with some Tibetan sound therapy. Ommm. **Grande Centre Point Hotel, 153/2 Soi Mahattek Luang 1, Ratchadamri Rd, +66 2670 5599.**



14 NIGHT OWL ◀
 Bangkok's a dream for insomniacs. Most spas (yes, even the upmarket ones) stay open till midnight, and you can eat around the clock. Go ringside for Thai boxing at Lumpini Stadium – the crowds are as much fun to watch as the boxers. Next door is Suan Lum Night Bazaar for late-night shopping and street-style food. And at the veteran Saxophone Pub (pictured), local swing bands trump up jazz classics. **3/8 Phayathai Rd, Victory Monument.**



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13 SPELLBOUND ▼
 Enter the Dream Hotel Bangkok in downtown Sukhumvit and you feel like you're on a different plane. Giant stupas greet you in the graphic, blue-themed lobby, a faux pink leopard prowls the striped Flava Bar, and even when you escape to your room, electric blue light emanates from beneath the bed. The glow is designed to aid sleep (but it might also trigger nightmares of being trapped in a spaceship). Comfortable but surreal, this is boutique dwelling for the avant-garde. **10 Sukhumvit Soi 15, +66 2254 8500, dreambkk.com.**



SCENES FROM A MALL ▶
 Like many of its Asian cousins, Bangkok excels in its malls. Locals flock here to escape the heat, cruise the marble atriums and ogle. With the covered skywalk, you can mall-hop from MBK to Central Chidlom without even having to set foot on a footpath. Many malls now offer specialised services such as personal shoppers, chauffeurs and translators. At Emporium, the 'hands-free shopping' puts an end to long queues and bag-handle chafing by allowing you to pay and collect all goods at a single point. Visit retail wonderland CentralWorld (pictured), where you can exercise your Tourist Privilege Card – did anyone say markdown? – through its staggering 500 stores, including the seven-floor fashion-house, Zen. **VE+T**

ML Kwantip Devakula at her restaurant, Deva



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