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The Chao Phraya River, near Charoenkrung Road.



BACC, in Siam.



Sri Trat, in Lower Sukhumvit.

City Savvy

Bangkok is blessed with far too many choices. This guide distills the best of each key 'hood so you can take on the town with the confidence of a local.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY **CHRIS SCHALKX**



Paco, in Lower Sukhumvit.



Namsaah Bottling Trust, in Sathorn.



Wat Phra Kaew, in Old Town.



AFFECTIONATELY NICKNAMED THE BIG MANGO, BANGKOK NEEDS MORE THAN A FEW BITES UNTIL IT REVEALS ITS CORE. AND RIGHT AFTER YOU THINK YOU'VE HAD A TASTE OF ALL THE SWEET SPOTS, YOU CAN BE SURE THAT A SLEW OF EXCITING NEW BARS, RESTAURANTS AND GALLERIES HAVE POPPED UP IN THE MEANTIME. DRIVEN BY LOCALS WITH SEEMINGLY UNBRIDLED CREATIVITY AND SAVVY EXPATS BRINGING IN THE BEST FROM ABROAD, THE THAI CAPITAL CONSTANTLY MANAGES TO REINVENT ITSELF—MAKING IT AN ENTHRALLING DESTINATION FOR BOTH FIRST-TIMERS AND VETERANS. WE'VE COMBED THROUGH ITS ON-THE-UP NEIGHBORHOODS IN SEARCH OF NOTEWORTHY NEW ADDITIONS AND UNMISSABLE CLASSICS.

THONGLOR

There's plenty of café-hopping and brunch-munching to do in Thonglor during the day, and you can't go wrong with **The Commons** (thecommonsbkk.com), an inside-outside, always busy spot that has redefined the community mall. Go for chocolate-making, sustainability or kiddie yoga classes, or just claim space at any of the communal tables and let everyone disperse for their choices of Mexican or Taiwanese fare, Neapolitan pizza, Maine lobster, global craft beers, and much more. After sunset Thonglor turns into Bangkok's after-dark playground. Hipster hangout Seenspace starts filling up, and its new Isaan spot **Der** (seenspace.com) beckons with tongue-numbing flavors in a sleek monochrome setting. A few streets down, the neon signs at **Funky Lam** (funky-lam.com) flick on—come here for modern takes on Lao classics. There is a creative cocktail list as well, but don't get too buzzed: it's time for a bar crawl. Make theater-themed **Backstage** (fb.com/backstagecocktailbarbkk) your first stop. Its team constantly brings home awards for mixology, and a sip of the signature Pink Me Up (Bacardi Carta Blanca, tomato, basil, orgeat and olive brine) proves these prizes are justified. Then swing by dimly lit **Libération** (fb.com/liberationbkk), from the acclaimed team behind nearby speakeasy Rabbit Hole, for some of Bangkok's most envelope-pushing drinks. Expect cocktails distilled and infused with items like fingerroot, goat milk, and water bugs—the latter tasting much better than it sounds.

Hotel Nikko (nikkobangkok.com; doubles from Bt4,500) is conveniently located at the beginning of Soi Thonglor and makes for the ideal crash pad after a night out. Its serene roots in the Land of the Rising Sun shine through not only in the “konnichiwa” you're welcomed with upon entering the lobby; the Zen-like rooms and its signature Japanese restaurant—authentic seasonal flavors, omotenashi service—reflect it just as much. Rooms come equipped with all the mod-cons you'd need for a comfortable stay (including work desks and TOTO washlets) and the swimming pool above the lobby offers swish views of the district.

LOWER SUKHUMVIT

The stretch of Sukhumvit Road between the Nana and Phrom Phong BTS stations might look mostly residential, but its small alleys are peppered with delicious secrets. Kick-start the day at **Paco** (instagram.com/pacobangkok) with a rainbow-hued, fruit-topped smoothie bowl served with a side of energizing hip-hop tunes. More sweet temptations await at **ICI** (fb.com/ici.bkk), a handsome house hidden deep in Soi 27 where Issaya Siamese head pâtissier Arisara “Paper” Chongphanitkul has been given free rein of the pastry menu. Expect cheeky creations almost too pretty to eat: cheesecake-filled balloons, and butterscotch choux pastries topped with tiny edible cowboy hats. Head to Soi 33 for dinner, where you can take your pick of Thai fare from all corners of the kingdom. Try

the fiery fish curries at **Sri Trat** (sritrat.com), a chic spot specializing in homey recipes from the eastern seaboard. Or stop by **Gedhawa** (78/2 Sukhumvit Soi 33; 66-2/662-0501), a tiny bolthole brimming with bric-a-brac where northern standards like *khao soi* (coconut curry with noodles) and *nam prik* (chili dip with blanched vegetables) hit the spot. Then, count down the side streets to Soi 11. Once the heart of Bangkok's rowdy nightlife scene, it's been reinvented as a much classier hangout in recent years, with drinking dens like **#FindThePhotoBooth** (fb.com/findthephotobooth) and the newly relocated **Hemingway's** (fb.com/hemingwaybkk) giving the street a new lease on life.

Bed down at the **Mövenpick Hotel** (movenpick.com; doubles from Bt2,700), a calm urban oasis in a quiet street between the buzz of Nana and Asoke. Meaning: Far enough from the noise, yet close enough to stumble to your bed after a late night out. The hotel's minimal black-and-white design incorporates modern Thai with the brand's Swiss background. This continues in the 297 spacious rooms, which are all done up in dark woods and punctuated by touches of colorful silk and marble. Topping it off is a garden-fringed rooftop pool, providing a welcome respite from the soaring tropical sun.

PLOENCHIT

Leafy Ploenchit is home to some of the city's poshest postcodes, naturally attracting top tables and glitzy boutiques to set up shop. Newly opened Siri House brings a slice of Palm Springs to Bangkok with its Mid-century Modern bungalow (all teak, velvet and chrome, plus a bean-shaped swimming pool to boot). At the heart of the house is **Quince** (quincebangkok.com), where chef Charlie Jones grills, smokes and roasts Mediterranean-inspired fare from the wood-fire ovens in his open kitchen. Head upstairs for a post-dinner drink at **Jacqueline** (fb.com/jacqueline.bkk), inspired by the well-stocked bar of America's legendary first lady. Michelin two-starred chef Gaggan Anand has opened a new wine bar **Wet** (getwetbkk.com), just next door, where you can get a casual taste of his style without the wait list. Or cross the road to **Gaa** (gaabkk.com), where 2019's Asia's Best Female Chef Garima Arora elevates locally sourced ingredients with innovative cooking techniques. Ploenchit isn't all high-rise and hi-so, though. Dig deep enough, and you'll uncover local gems that will only set you back a handful of baht:



Sri Trat.



#FindThePhotoBooth.

Polo Fried Chicken (10 Sanam Khli Alley; 66-2/655-8489)—widely regarded as serving the best fried chicken in town—or the old-school **Sanguan Sri** (59/1 Wireless Rd.; 66-2/251-9378), specializing in home-style recipes from the Thai south.

An exciting recent addition to Ploenchit's skyline is the **Rosewood Bangkok** (rosewoodbangkok.com, doubles from Bt9,450), a gorgeous luxury hotel built to resemble the shape of a *wai* (the Thai hand greeting). Each of its 159 rooms feels delightfully residential thanks to smartly separated living areas, plenty of coffee-table books, and artsy keepsakes. All feature large floor-to-ceiling windows keeping them bright and offering stunning city views, while some of the top-end suites come with expansive balconies and private plunge pools. And even if you're not staying over, its pan-Chinese restaurant Nan Bei and the Art-Deco Lennon's whiskey bar are worth a stop.

SIAM / RAJADAMRI

Mallrats, rejoice. There are few better areas to shop in Bangkok than in Siam, where mall after mall line the street on both sides. The usual suspects are all here, but seek out **O.D.S.** (siamdiscovery.co.th) in the Nendo-designed Siam Discovery for Thai designer-ware you won't find anywhere else. Or dive into the warren of streets that is Siam Square, where quirky boutiques like **Frank Garcon** (instagram.com/frank_garcon) and **Everyday Karmakamet** (everydaykmkm.com) stockpile cool vintage goods and a



Gedhawa.



Quince.

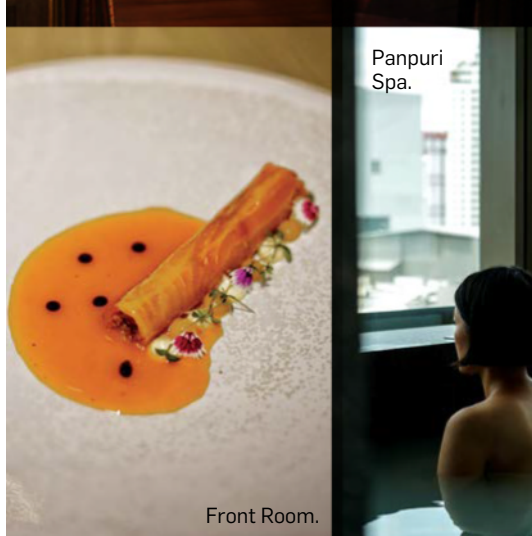
Jacqueline.



Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC).



Namsaah Bottling Trust.



Front Room.

well-curated selection of Thai- and international indie labels. For a culture fix, stop by Thailand's answer to the Guggenheim, the **Bangkok Art and Culture Centre** (bacc.or.th) with an ever-changing collection of contemporary art from here and abroad. Book an hour in the private onsen at the excellent **Panpuri Spa** (panpuriwellness.com) to relieve your weary legs after a day on the go, while gazing at the hubbub of the Ratchaprasong intersection just below. After, you can head downstairs to **Paste** (pastebangkok.com), for chef-owner Bongkoch "Bee" Satongun's intricately plated renditions of ancient Thai recipes. Her signature smoky yellow curry with Australian spanner crab will show you just why the restaurant bagged a Michelin star last year. Flash Thai cuisine of a different mode is found at **Front Room** (waldorfastoria.com). Here, chef Rungthiwa "Fae" Chummongkhon fuses her local roots with her experience at Noma into a 10-course Nordic-Thai tasting menu that brings together the best of both cuisines.

Front Room is part of the chic **Waldorf Astoria Bangkok** (waldorfastoria.com, doubles from Bt9,500). Designed by Hong Kong-based André Fu, the shimmering tower delivers touches of Art Nouveau (a nod to Waldorf Astoria's New York origins) and haute local elements like teakwood furnishings and silk headboards emblazoned with Thai motifs. Rooms all come with huge marble-clad bathrooms and views of either the Royal Bangkok Sports Club or the Ratchaprasong intersection—both if you're lucky. Head up to the 57th floor for The Loft, a destination in its own right where excellent cocktails match with even better views.



PAII.

SATHORN

It's not all business deals and financial transactions being made in Sathorn, Bangkok's primary office district. Tucked between its glaring skyscrapers you'll also find some of the city's most exciting dining destinations. Take **PAII** (paiibangkok.com), in a historic candy-colored colonial villa planted firmly between its towering steel neighbors. The seafood-centric menu delivers bold Thai flavors, with standouts including the clay-baked mud crab from Samut Songkram and perfectly fried rice hidden under a gigantic pile of sweet crab chunks. Just a few blocks away, another villa houses **Namsaah Bottling Trust** (namsaah.com), a sultry hangout serving indulgent riffs on Thai classics thought up by celebrity chef Ian Kittichai. Think: *pad Thai* with foie gras, duck confit spring rolls, and some seriously fun cocktails. For a change of culinary scenery head to **Ocken** (ockenbkk.com), a casual fine-dining spot on the southern end of Sathorn. The menu here is ever-changing and doesn't define itself by geographical boundaries. Order the tasting set and let chef Johnny Liu surprise you with flavors from Spain to Japan. Or hit up **Olta** (fb.com/olta.bkk) on Soi Suan Plu for fuss-free modern British fare by Fat Duck-alum Jamie Wakeford. Then, the art-inspired cocktails at **Vesper** (vesperbar.co) are just the ticket for a nightcap—or will mark the beginning of a long, long night.

Make **The Sukhothai** (sukhothai.com, doubles from Bt8,200) your base and you'll be rewarded with a plum position along Sathorn road, in a Zen-inducing inside-outside garden of Eden, with sleek minimalist interiors courtesy of Ed Tuttle and the late Kerry Hill. Rooms here are some of the biggest in town, and especially the ones overlooking the serene lily-dotted courtyard make you forget you're smack in the middle of a throbbing metropolis. It feels like your own sprawling villa. Don't miss the hotel's signature chocolate buffet—a white-glove, silver-spoon affair that is truly as indulgent as it sounds.

CHAROENKRUNG

Street scenes don't get more Bangkok than in Charoenkrung, where you'll find cutting-edge galleries sandwiched between age-old mom-and-pop shops, and briny wafts of fish sauce mingling with freshly roasted arabica. Get a lay of the land at **Sarnies** (sarniescafe.com), which perfectly embodies this contrast between old and new. Occupying a crumbling

shophouse in the shadow of the Shangri-La, this Singapore-hailing coffee spot is serious about their brews, with beans roasted in their own roastery downtown. They also serve a mean smashed avocado toast (topped with feta crumbles and dukkah) and irresistible chocolate fudge brownies. Just a short hop away, gallery **ATT19** ([instagram.com/att19.bkk](https://www.instagram.com/att19.bkk)) helps cement the area's position as a burgeoning arts district with a mix of Chinese antiques and African art on display in a sleekly renovated school building. Then follow the river northward until you reach Song Wat Road, an up-and-coming pocket of cool on the fringe of Chinatown. Cases in point: hidden cocktail spot **Barbon** ([fb.com/barbonbkk](https://www.facebook.com/barbonbkk)), and the neon-lit **Shuu Shuu** ([fb.com/shuushuu.hiddenplace](https://www.facebook.com/shuushuu.hiddenplace)) umeshu bar. Or its latest addition, the aptly named **FV** ([instagram.com/fv_bkk](https://www.instagram.com/fv_bkk)), where almost-forgotten local crops end up in juices and smoothies (the name is short for fruits and veg) prepared against a backdrop of rare designer furniture and an Isaan stilted house. For dinner, there are options aplenty—this is one of Bangkok's premier street-food 'hoods after all. The peppery roll noodles at **Nai Ek** (442 Soi Yaowarat 9) are a must. But if curbside meals are a little too low-key, snag a table at **100 Mahaseth** ([fb.com/100mahaseth](https://www.facebook.com/100mahaseth)) or **80/20** ([fb.com/8020bkk](https://www.facebook.com/8020bkk)) to discover where contemporary Thai cuisine is heading.

Thanks to its location on the "other" side of the Chao Phraya, rooms at the **Peninsula Bangkok** ([peninsula.com](https://www.peninsula.com), doubles from Bt9,000) boast some of the best city views in town. This hotel is a classic, so expect white glove service, starched napkins, and a healthy dose of old-world charm—but with all the contemporary luxury, of course. The excellent spa is a must for Thai massages, the river-facing pool a great spot for lazy afternoons. You'll find plenty of dinner options at the new **ICONSIAM** right next door, but few dining experiences beat the romantic riverside setting of Thiptara, the hotel's own Thai restaurant.

OLD TOWN

Old is (literally) gold in Bangkok's temple-studded royal district, but it's the new additions that have put the area on the radar of the city's hip young things. The lanes around Lan Luang Road—referred to as "Old Town East" by the in-crowd—have seen cafés, bars and restaurants open (and close, alas) at breakneck speed. Favorites include the Parisian-chic **Eden's** (7/1 Lan Luang Road; 66-2/625-2000), where owner

Niram Watthanasit creates his sinfully delicious cakes and pastries from scratch in the bakery at the back of the shop. The European ambience extends next door to **Alex & Beth** ([fb.com/alexandbethbangkok](https://www.facebook.com/alexandbethbangkok)), with mismatched chairs, vintage school posters and dried-flower bouquets. Come here for well-priced sandwiches, cold-pressed juices, and coffee in porcelain cups. When the night falls, zip past the district's beautifully lit-up pagodas on your way to **Ku Bar** ([fb.com/ku.bangkok](https://www.facebook.com/ku.bangkok)). This blink-and-you-miss-it speakeasy is hidden on the third floor of a seemingly abandoned warehouse and spotlights local-market finds in simple, yet wildly creative cocktails. The Preserved Lime, made with coriander-root mezcal, preserved lime and guava, is a firm favorite. Downstairs, the unpretentious **Kang Kao** ([fb.com/kangkaobkk](https://www.facebook.com/kangkaobkk)) lures in-the-know imbibers with biodynamic wines and bar bites by Bunker alum Arnie Marcella.

Located on a quiet stretch of the Chao Phraya, ultra-chic **The Siam** ([thesiamhotel.com](https://www.thesiamhotel.com), doubles from Bt18,900) is the address of choice for deep-pocketed boutique-hotel aficionados. Hospitality guru Bill Bensley peppered the place with vintage travel trunks, priceless Thai antiques and Art Deco elements flown in from around the globe. No details have been left untouched, as even the hotel gym and opulent Opium Spa are show-stoppers in their own rights. The hotel is an all-suites affair, with even the entry-level rooms boasting butler service and enormous bathrooms. For a little more privacy, the villas are worth the splurge—and the plunge, as each equipped with its own pool. +

