

BANGKOK TRAVEL GUIDE – THAILAND’S FOOD CAPITAL



I am a black sheep because I loved Bangkok. The food and food smells and restaurants and street food stalls and giant temples and grit were so up my alley. My husband and I planned a one week trip to Thailand with Bangkok as our first stop because we are obsessed with Thai food. Since my husband was a little boy, his favorite food had always been and still is Pad Thai. I admit that Pad Thai was my drunk food du jour in college, and I also grew up going to our local Thai spot at least twice a week. Bangkok is *loaded* with the best Thai food in the world and a huge food scene. We only had one day in Bangkok, but we ate 4 meals, all less than \$5, and they all appear in my dreams from time to time. Here's my guide to what I did, but mostly what I ate.

SHOULD I VISIT BANGKOK?

People have plenty of opinions about Bangkok – it's a little big, a little grungy, and doesn't have much natural beauty to speak of. I, for one, mainly came to Thailand for the food and the beaches – and you can't get better, more authentic Thai food than you can in Bangkok. From the street food culture, to the population of working-class Thais, the options are endless and delicious. If you are really into Thai food, and this is one of the biggest reasons you are coming to Thailand (like me), then Bangkok is a must stop in my opinion.

Also, the temples are *massive* and definitely give you the largest temple experience in Thailand. Because you are in a big urban city, you are also going to find big urban city things like world-class shopping, rooftop bars, high-end dining, and more. Bangkok is also a *great* place to get a Thai massage!

For an overview of Thailand from my travels there, check out [my Thailand overview guide](#).

WHAT TIME OF YEAR SHOULD I VISIT BANGKOK?

You are probably planning on visiting some other areas of Thailand while you are here, like **Chiang Mai** or **Krabi**. If you want to tie in Krabi or Phuket to your trip, you're going to want to come, ideally, from January to March for the best weather. November, December, and April are good too but because of the holidays (Thai holiday in April), crowds are plenty. The shoulder seasons are April through June, September, and October where the weather is incredibly hot, but the crowds are thinner. July and August are monsoon season where frequent, short bouts of heavy rain predominate the day.

HOW DO I GET TO BANGKOK?

We landed in Bangkok at Suvarnabhumi (BKK) around midnight after a layover in Tokyo, and I think we took a cab into the city. There are direct flights to Bangkok, but they were like \$2000 more than the tickets we purchased. Maybe Bangkok is not your first stop from the US, and you may be coming in by train or a smaller, national airline. There are actually two airports in Bangkok – we flew out of the second one – Don Muang (DMK). I recall both being nice airports.

When you arrive to BKK, there is free Airport WiFi. Public taxi stands are located on Level 1, one floor down from the Arrivals level. You will need to go to the taxi stand where they will give you a little slip of paper and then head to the taxi. It should be around 600 Baht (\$20). I would recommend getting out Baht at the ATMs in the airport with a debit card before you get your taxi. The taxi takes about ~45 minutes in off hours.

Because we arrived so late, we did not have any other options to get into the city. However, there are two public transportation options as well that are cheaper – a bus and a train. For the record, I assume Uber is an option as well, but I didn't have a data plan when I went on this trip, so Uber wasn't an option for me.

For the bus, Airport Express operates hourly buses on four routes for 150 Baht from 5 AM to midnight. The Airport Express counter is located on Level 1, near entrance 8.

The Airport Rail Link City Line leaves every 15 minutes, takes 25 minutes, and costs 45 Baht per person (6 AM to midnight). Once you arrive to Playa Thai, you can either switch to the BTS or take a cab from there. To purchase your ticket for the Airport Line, find an "Automatic Token Dispenser" at the station, enter destination (Playathai), and the number of passengers. Online says they accept coins and bills, so have those handy ahead of time as well. To buy tickets for the BTS, you will have similar machines at every station where you can enter your destination (16 – 44 Baht per journey). There is also the option to buy a Day Pass for 140 Baht which could be worth it if you are traveling often enough / do not want to buy a ticket every single time.

IS THERE A LANGUAGE BARRIER IN BANGKOK?

Because of abundant public transportation, and the best way to order food being pointing at it, language is not an issue. Most people speak English in the first place, but you shouldn't need to converse with them too much in the first place. An interesting thing that I noted was how you absolutely can't read any signs or words above shops or restaurants since it's not the English alphabet! I would highly recommend downloading Google Translate and the offline Thai file in case you need to use the camera feature to decipher something.

WHERE SHOULD I STAY IN BANGKOK?

In Bangkok, my two hotel priorities were: close to the sights / easy to get to the sights and quiet since I know we would be so jetlagged and needed good sleep.

I quickly discovered that anything near the temples was not going to be quiet, or it was much too expensive (The Peninsula and The Mandarin are on the river and look gorgeous if it's in your budget). So my next option was staying close to a BTS line that could get me into the sights quickly and efficiently. We ended up staying in a random hotel that was close to the BTS, and it met our needs – it was called Hotel Icon.

I do recommend **checking out TripAdvisor for hotels**, because you can stay at some really great hotels for a low price! Especially in off season! I was uncomfortable doing an AirBnB in such a foreign country to me, but I'm sure that is an option as well. I had friends stay in pod hostels as well.

To summarize, my recommendation is to stay close to the sights in a nice hotel or to stay further away close to a BTS line if you are trying to save money.

HOW DO I GET AROUND BANGKOK?

We mainly used the BTS to get around, especially from our accommodation heading west towards the temples. I mentioned above how to get tickets for this. Make sure you use Google Maps and map out your route ahead of time so you know where to stop. It is good to remember how many stops you have as well, because it will be difficult to understand what the speaker says.

The touristy way to get around is on a tuk tuk. They will massively upcharge you, but you've got to do it once! We did it once just to say we did, and it was really fun. Ask them ahead of time how much it will be to get to X destination so that you are not surprised by the fee.

There is also a river cruise that you can use to get from the end of the BTS line to the temples – we actually took this route. It was pretty sketchy though, so I can't say I highly recommend it. But hey, that's Thailand for you!

HOW MANY DAYS SHOULD I SPEND IN BANGKOK?

1-2 days is all you need.

WHAT IS THERE TO DO IN BANGKOK?

TEMPLES

Bangkok is home to three very large temples. Honestly, we were only in the mood to do one, so we picked Wat Pho. The other two are Wat Arun and The Grand Palace.

WAT PHO

This is a great temple to go to if you just want to see one because it has the Reclining Buddha!! There were also lots of cool areas to wander around. It was 100 Baht (\$3) per person to get in, and we probably spent an hour here.

We took the Chao Phraya Express Boat to the temple because that was the easiest and cheapest way to get there (14 Baht each, \$0.50). To copy us, you take the BTS to Saphan Taksin and then get on the express boat that stops at Wat Pho. **Use this website for the most up to date route map and prices.**

When you get off at Wat Pho, be smart and don't talk to strangers. When we went, there was a scheme where strangers would try to tell you that they had the best shop or the best temple, and then they would take you into a random place and force you to buy something. Just walk towards the temple entrance and ignore everyone else!









WAT ARUN AND GRAND PALACE

TBH, my husband and I were kind of over the Wats after the first one, but these are the other two most famous. The Grand Palace is HUGE and supposed to be so gorgeous but I think it was like \$20 a person and we were just not feeling it. It has a famous Emerald Buddha inside. Wat Arun is across the river and looks really pretty! To get to Wat Arun, I think you would have to take the river cruise to the other side.

THAI MASSAGE

If you look online, you will find so many different recommendations for where to get a good Thai massage!! I was honestly pretty thorough in my research of this, because I was mortified at the thought of accidentally going into a place that wanted to give my husband a happy ending, lol.

A couple friends had visited Bangkok right before me and recommended **Ruen Naud**, so that is where we went. Being that it was our first Thai massage ever, it was amaaaaazing. I loved every minute of it. It is quite the experience for sure. It looks like Ruen Naud leveled up to some swankier digs so check them out! Their **Facebook page** has their whole price list, but a 1 hr massage is 350 Baht (\$12).

SHOPPING

Bangkok is known for their crazy shopping malls so here are a few that I read about: MBK Center, Terminal 21, Siam Paragon.

ROOFTOP BARS

A couple I read about were Sky Bar and Vertical Grill Moon Bar. Note that you will need a cuter outfit as they usually have a dress code!

MARKETS

I did want to visit the floating markets you see and read about in Bangkok. But when I did my research, it looked like the only way to experience was to do a day trip from Bangkok, and I didn't want to spend another day in Bangkok just to do this. I would recommend using a tour operator for this if you want to go as it seemed pretty overwhelming to me.

Check out TripAdvisor for all the tour options.

There were also lots of markets inside the city, but most were only open on the weekends and we were there on a Monday. Do your research if a market interests you. I know the Chatuchak Weekend Market is the most popular one.

EAT ALL THE FOODS

More below

WHERE DO I EAT IN BANGKOK?

I'll cover the places we ate at, along with more upscale places we read about but did not want to dish out the cash for.

BOAT NOODLES

This was a random thing that I read about on a few **food articles about Bangkok** and knew I had to try.

So I made it our breakfast. There's this little place off of the Victory Monument known as Boat Noodle Alley. It's difficult to find and there are absolutely no tourists. If you're not super into this idea, don't go out of your way to seek it out. You sit down and point at the menu which one you want. It's basically broth and some veggies and a little meatball thing. You slurp it down and ask for another round. You continue to do this and stack up your bowls until you're full. Each bowl is essentially \$0.10. My husband and I just got one bowl each to try it, so we spent \$0.20 on breakfast. We ate at Pranakorn Noodle Restaurant on Google Maps.



PAD THAI

We read about one place that was pretty touristy and had lines that form as soon as the restaurant opens, but it's the best pad Thai in Bangkok. So we said what the heck and went at 4:30 pm before it opened at 5. The pad Thai really was so delicious. We got on wrapped in the omelet and one without. You'll know what I'm talking about if you go.



STREET FOOD

For lunch, after our massage, we passed a street food cart with a pretty long line of locals. I had read that you should only go to one with long lines, so this seemed like a good sign. We pointed at some dishes after watching the people in front of us – Oyster omelet, pork larb, some other kind of stir fry. I have no idea what we ordered but it was all delicious and all cheap.

In recent years, Bangkok has been cracking down on the street food scene. There was a rumor that they would end the entire street food culture, and now I think they are just concentrating it to a few areas. I found [this great NYT article](#) that gives an update of where to go if you want some street food.

FANCY FOOD

Bangkok has actually had two restaurants featured on Chef's Table, if you are into that Netflix show. We were and actually had bookings at [Gaggan](#) after falling in love with Chef's Table's first season. About a month before our trip, we had to get real and remember that we booked a trip to Thailand to eat cheap, delicious Thai food so what were we doing eating a \$150/person Indian tasting menu. But still it looks soooo good.

The most recent season of Chef's Table just aired, and there was another Bangkok restaurant. [Bo.lan](#) actually serves Thai food and I would definitely go if we went back to Bangkok.

During the Bo.lan episode, you learn that the chef was trained at **Nahm** in London which has since moved to Bangkok. This is another great upscale Thai restaurant choice while in Bangkok.

FOOD EVERYWHERE

There really is food everywhere in Bangkok. If none of the above looks good to you, just do your research. There are Bangkok food episodes all over Netflix and city guides galore. Also of note is that there is a 7/11 on like every corner. We stopped in to get some local snacks (Pocky sticks, duh) and water from time to time.

IS THERE A PLACE TO GO OUT IN BANGKOK?

Most people spend their evenings on the rooftop bars. Bangkok is also the capital of all the weird sex shows like lady boy cabarets and ping pong shows (do NOT google this if you don't know what it is), if you are into that kind of thing. I do not have any information about any of this stuff!

WHAT SHOULD I PACK FOR BANGKOK?

There are two conflicting, unique characteristics to consider when packing for Bangkok – it is very hot and humid **but** you have to cover your knees and shoulders / wear loose clothing (no leggings) when visiting the temples. Most likely, you have plans to visit the temples. If you want to dress in minimal clothing to avoid the heat, you have a few options – you can rent a robe thing at the temple which really grossed me out but it's an option, you can bring a cardigan to put on for the temple and a pair of loose pants to pull on over your shorts (they sell loose “elephant” pants all over the place for dirt cheap), or you can just bring a change of clothes and find a bathroom somewhere to change. For me, I just found a fun pair of printed loose pants that I wore with a cotton tee and midly sweated. Your choice!

If you want to go to some of the nicer restaurants or rooftop bars in Bangkok, remember to bring a nicer dress. Some of them have specific dress codes, so look ahead of time. I had no other place in my itinerary that required a nice outfit, so I decided the rooftop bars weren't worth it to me – not to mention I was so jetlagged that staying up past 9 sounded pretty unappealing.

HONESTLY, HOW MUCH DID YOU SPEND IN BANGKOK?

Total for 2 nights = \$118

Hotel = \$78 / person

Transportation = \$15 (1 cab, 3 BTS, 1 boat, 1 tuk tuk)

Food = \$10 (4 meals)

Massage = \$12

Temple Entrance = \$3

Jaw. Dropped.

MY PERFECT ONE DAY ITINERARY FOR BANGKOK

ONE FULL DAY

I will tell you how we *actually did* spend our one full day in Bangkok, because I planned the sh!t out of this itinerary and thought it was pretty darn good.

BREAKFAST

Take the BTS to Victory Monument to eat boat noodles. Walk to boat noodle alley on the NE corner of Victory monument roundabout. Feel like a badass for finding such a **cool, random spot**. Point to the menu and order 1-5 bowls of boat noodles. Walk out \$1 poorer.

Alternative breakfast suggestions: walk around the street from your hotel and see what is for sale. Get some Thai iced coffee and some street breakfast if you are brave (I am brave). You will not find eggs and bacon here, my dear. If you are staying at a boujee hotel with free breakfast, get yo fill.

MASSAGE

Take the BTS to Phrom Phong and walk to Ruen Naud. Get an hour or 90 minute Thai massage. Or ball out on a whole spa package. This part is non-negotiable, but you may also do this at the end of the day after sightseeing. If you are hungry at this point, look up some cool spots nearby the massage as the options around the temples are pretty limited and touristy.

TEMPLES

If you're feeling rather frisky, then pay for a tuk tuk to take you to Wat Pho. This will probably set you back \$20, but that's a total guess. If you're feeling like one of the thousands of backpackers that surround you, take the BTS to Saphan Taksin and then walk to the river cruise. Take the express boat down the river to Wat Pho. Please understand that this "riverboat cruise" is not what you imagine a riverboat cruise would be. You are sailing along a brown river filled with garbage in a boat that might sink at any moment, but hey that's Thailand.

Get out and see Wat Pho! It's seriously so fun to walk around, especially if this is your first temple. Up to you rather you also want to venture to Wat Arun and Grand Palace. Just make sure you have plenty of Baht with you.

DINNER

At this point, it was around 4 PM and we were *feeling* that 16 hour flight over. We wandered a bit and made our way to Thip Samai for the "best pad thai in town" before it opened at 5 and I can report that we did have incredible pad thai. We then hopped on a tuk tuk back to our hotel and slept a very wonderful night.

Optional fancy dinner reservation if you have it in you. Optional chinatown / yaowarat visit. Optional roof top bar!